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# The Overture! Then Is Here-And-Now: Hindsight Is Twenty, Twenty?

Elena Kydd
*Georgia College & State University*, elena.kydd@bobcats.gcsu.edu

# The Overture! Then Is Here-And-Now: Hindsight Is Twenty, Twenty?

Elena Kydd, B.A.Mus

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Thesis Committee:
Laurie Peebles, Ph.D., LPMT, MT-BC
Ashlee Holsey, Ph.D., NCC, LPC
Katie Whipple, MMT, LPMT, MT-BC

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## Signatures

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Laurie Peebles | Laurie Peebles | 12/12/2023 |
| Faculty Advisor (print name) | (signature) | Date: |
| Katie Whipple | Katie Whipple | 12/12/23 |
| Committee Member (print name) | (signature) | Date: |
| ASHLEE HOLSEY | DocuSigned by: 4AC8015B46F246F... | 12/12/2023 |
| Committee Member (print name) | (signature) | Date: |
| Elena Kydd | DocuSigned by: E. Kydd 79A408E703AC40C... | 12/12/2023 |
| Student (print name) | (signature) | Date: |

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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

## Introduction and Background Information:

Growing up, I grew up with diversity around me, where my perceptions of what and who was around me were common. Although my neighborhood was predominantly 'black,' the exposure outside of the home has broadened my view. I grew up in this pseudo-color-blind world, where the dialogue of racism went unnoticed. The average person rejected the discourse on racism, failed to acknowledge racism, pretended racism did not exist, and failed to educate self about racism. Thus, I remove the proverbial veil to reveal the blind spots and hidden cracks that society has meticulously crafted – the unveiling of systemic injustices and the invisible narratives of marginalized voices. There is a notion of race being universal in language, such that the progressive and enlightening terminology situates race on a level of greatness. As a result, whiteness becomes neutralized and reinforced in the historical backdrop of American culture. The social construct of race is indeed in everything; thus, color is everywhere; it is bold, vibrant, and stunning! Through my direct experience, race and racism exists, and it is prevalent. The very fabric of the American culture, where policy, curriculum, politics, and economics refuse to acknowledge its very existence, wanders through the world with an enormous level of "innocence" and freedom, hence ambivalence and oblivion. This status quo of invisibility and impartiality is laid out before me.

Implicitly, I have been taught that there is shame in blackness, where ordinary depictions and stereotypes are whittled down to dehumanizing proportions. I have learned that those who have false beliefs are those who look or resemble me from mass media consumption. My psyche then becomes entrenched with negativity and toils on the question of defining the meaning of who I am. I am realized two-dimensionally and not from any genuine attempt to get to know -

me. There is an underlying struggle where the gaze of who I am is tied up in proximity to whiteness. Dubois (1989) expressed this juxtaposition to whiteness as the "double consciousness," where the binary of Blackness and whiteness are dueling contradictions of oneself (p. 2). He further goes on to explain that every Black person has "two warring ideals in one dark body" - Blackness that is embodied and operated in then grapples with the contradictions to whiteness, a warring body that I am forced to be in (Dubois, 1989, p. 2). This "double consciousness" has great relevance in today's times and speaks to my current condition.

So then, how do I divest between a system that functions and a system that allows racism to continue to exist? Whiteness, white supremacy, national chauvinism, anti-Blackness, and American imperialism are all wedded terms that the 'majority' upholds, which needs to be deconstructed and dismantled! I understand the distinctions of my Blackness, I recognize my unique differences, and know that I do not fall under one monolithic group. This is not a revelation; however, I am reminded each and every day through stereotypes, tropes, and a reduction of my Blackness that the social structures cluster me to a phenotype. My footprint allows me to be an individual in my intersectionality of blackness and womanhood.

So, I write. I write in a contemplative manner to explore, offer new insights, explain, and share my experience as a Georgia College & State University (GCSU) graduate-equivalency scholar. I write to address the Black communities, which is my own impact in music therapy, and how the impact of racial trauma affects me. In my assertions, I attempt to bring a nuanced understanding of how my experiences at GCSU can help shape and contribute to the music therapy profession by validating the experiences of others who share similar experiences but serve as a linchpin to amplify marginalized voices, precipitate change, and inform those who may need solutions.

Let me rewind.

In 2020, the global pandemic of the virus forced the world to be privy to the racial pandemic of anti-Blackness. This reintroduction of depravity and wickedness exposed the lie that says we are living in a post-racial nation and declared that racism pervades. Evilness displayed on social media by the very people who are installed to "serve and protect" is complex and troublesome to endure. Savagery envelopes my view, and I am constantly reminded of the brutal nature of an oppressive system that continues to run rampant. Racism is a term defined by William & Printz (2018) as "prejudice, discrimination, and violence against marginalized groups based on attitudes of superiority from the dominant society" (p. 736). Another relevant definition by Lorde (1980) succinctly captures racism as "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 115). Consequently, both definitions are appendages to white supremacy, functioning as a gaping wound that never heals. To me, racism affects every sphere of existence and is fueled by baseless destruction, capitalism, greed, patriarchal worship, and narcissism. This systemic oppression erases Blackness and glorifies whiteness. This very racism is a reminder of my trauma – my racial trauma. I broach this autoethnography with the reminder that racism impacts every aspect of my life (from the 'cradle to the grave'). Therefore, I speak on the traumatic experiences that have been presented to me directly and vicariously within the educational arena at GCSU.

There is a complexity embedded in the racial caste system of the United States, and I would venture to say globally that reverberates. Making the distinction that this system and my writing will foster an empowering discussion, I assert that as part of the Black community, I have agency and reject disempowerment. I am addressing a fractured and entitled system that is predicated on a handout and where the trope of *pulling yourself up from your bootstraps* is

misleadingly used to assume success. I am addressing the very structures of a system that is shaped by society and thus present within the music therapy program at GCSU and our profession. For this reason, I choose to highlight myself as a non-traditional scholar and Black woman. Wall (2016) suggested that the auto-ethnographer consider the "macro and micro linkages" of my sociocultural identity by "exploring themes to theorize and explicate" (p. 2). I pay respect to every marginalized group that falls under the obscurity of a blanket category. Yet, my voice and firsthand experiences may help others to negotiate and navigate a failed system that refuses to value their own experiences. My writing is meant to empower myself and others willing to read, reflect, and listen. Through my writing, I endeavor to shed light on my unique experiences, and through my understanding, I can encapsulate "an embodied sense of lived experience" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

**Georgia College & State University Music Therapy Program**

At GCSU, the route I took to become a music therapy equivalency student will be discussed as an introduction to highlight my journey of attaining a master's in music therapy. In doing so, I have researched the American Music Therapy Association's (AMTA, 2023) requirements for the appropriate program of study delineated in the *Standards for Education and Clinical Training.* According to the AMTA Standards (2022), a program that meets competencies in the general areas of musical foundations, clinical foundations, music therapy foundation, principles, and general education are offered to fulfill the bachelor's component. Concurrently, competencies for the master's degree were to be taken, such as research, music therapy theory, musical development and personal growth, clinical administration, and advanced clinical skills (AMTA, 2022).

At GCSU, courses like improvisation, music history, music theory, and piano and guitar for therapists fulfilled the aptitude for musical foundation. As it pertained to the curriculum, to meet the clinical foundations and music therapy foundation and principles proficiencies, courses like Psychology of Music, Research in Music, Music Therapy Principles and Practicum with Children and Adults, Methods and Materials, as well as Leadership in Music Therapy were designed to my program of study. Following the curriculum at GCSU as an equivalency student, synchronous graduate work was satisfied, where courses in Qualitative Research In Creative Arts Therapies, Ethics In Creative Arts Therapy, Music Therapy Models, Gender And Cultural Issues In Creative Arts Therapies, Quantitative Research In Music Therapy, Collegiate Teaching, Clinical Improvisation, and Thesis were weaved in a program of study to gain an in-depth understanding of the clinical and theoretical underpinnings of the graduate education. After completing all courses, GCSU required all equivalent students to take a comprehensive examination to assess and determine their critical analysis and understanding of crucial elements in theoretical frameworks, research methodologies, and global knowledge in music therapy.

However, the GCSU music therapy curriculum lacked an integrative approach to promoting diversity, inclusive practices, and a curriculum that incorporates a multicultural-social justice lens. When music and theoretical frames are taught, Eurocentrism's very power and values expose a dichotomous view of cultural superiority versus inferiority. A sense of identity, in particular cultural identity, is lost. The 2021 AMTA survey indicated that white music therapists were a majority in the field, which further fueled Eurocentric ideologies in the profession that relied heavily on the unconscious biases, stereotypes, and racial misbeliefs of dominant narratives. The paradox of GCSU's music therapy curriculum is such that it touts itself

to be inclusive and culturally relevant, but only as it pertains to music. Reframing the curriculum is necessary, grounded in a multicultural stance, and oriented in a social justice manner.

Norris (2020) had "A Call for Radical Imagining," which bade the music therapy profession to think beyond the limited scope of "static and unidimensional preoccupation" since the mass awakening of an unjust world reared its ugly head to millions of people around the world (p. 3). Like its profession, the music therapy program at GCSU calls for only maintaining the status quo, using language like diversity, equity, inclusion, and culturalism to cloak under indifference and omission of facts. At what point does this higher learning institution take a stance in reflecting, challenging, and dismantling an antiquated system of oppression? Norris (2020) powerfully humanized the experiences of marginalized communities by expressing their harsh truths and facts, so within this cruel and unjust world, she begged us to envision a transformational and collaborative profession. A profession and educational system that will afford us to center other voices, whereby "culturally relevant theoretical frameworks" are used, an imagining where *we* are rooted in social justice, and a more fertile "disciplinary landscape" is navigated (Norris, 2020, p. 4).

Mirroring the values of its institution, GCSU, the music therapy program has a significantly lower representation of Black scholars than white scholars, reinforcing the normalization of whiteness in the program. The data set used to make this claim represents Black and White scholars over four years, from the Fall of 2019 to the Fall of 2023. I did not differentiate between the demographics of scholars enrolled in the masters-equivalency, bachelor's, and master's degrees as the data did not separate the values per degree. Instead, I tallied the total enrollment of Black scholars to White scholars in the music therapy program, per the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (2023). According to the data, in the Fall

of 2019, there were 3.77% black scholars, and 84.91% were white scholars; in the Fall of 2020, 6.25% were black scholars, and 72.92% were white scholars; in the Fall of 2021, 8.69% were black scholars and 72.74% were white scholars; in Fall of 2022, 8.82% were black scholars and 76.47% were white scholars; lastly in Fall of 2023, 12.12% were black scholars and 69.70% were white scholars. With this knowledge, I felt it necessary to include a brief college history.

In 1889, GCSU was initially called Georgia Normal and Industrial College (GN&IC), a two-year women's educational facility that taught business skills and teacher training, and later became a four-year college in 1917. GN&IC went through its first renaming in 1922, a teacher's training facility called Georgia State College for Women (GSCW). Within 10 years, it joined 26 other state-supported colleges and universities within the University System of Georgia. From 1943 to 1945, GSCW housed U.S. Navy training for 15,000 women, focusing on storekeeping and clerical skills for the Navy. Between 1953 and 1956, GSCW president Dr. Stanford pushed to have the educational institution co-educational. In 1958, GSCW offered its first graduate degree in education, and two years later, it underwent its second renaming, Women's College of Georgia (WCG). WCG enrolled their first Black scholar, Cellestine Hill, in 1964, who graduated with her psychology degree. Three years later, WCG officially became co-educational under its new name, Georgia College at Milledgeville (GCM). As more graduate programs expanded, GCM established its Honors Program in 1970.

One year later, GCM went through its fourth renaming Georgia College (GC). During his presidency from 1981-1996, Dr. Spier established the college's International Exchange Program, primarily with China, and later the Global Bound in 1987, an international interaction with study abroad programs. 1996 marked the college's most current and official name, Georgia College & State University (GCSU). One year later, GCSU inducted its first woman president, Dr. DePaola,

who helped the university become a member of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC) and the founding member of the Georgia WebMBA program. In May 2012, GCSU offered its first doctorate program for nurse practitioners. In 2017, the establishment of The Hub (Honoring, Uniting, and Building) housed the college Cultural Centre, Black Student Alliance, Latino Student Association, Women's Centre, LGBTQ+, and Project BRAVE. As of present, President Cathy Cox aims to provide a student-centered approach to education (Bodkin, 2023).

The music therapy program recognizes diversity, equity, and inclusion, where inclusive spaces are part of the "core values of reason, respect, and responsibility" (GCSU, 2022). Initiatives embedded in the school's mission only give a façade to the campus's desire for inclusion but do not provide any clear answers to how committed the university is to underrepresented communities, hence the black community regarding their emotional and psychological well-being. There seem to be limited efforts to have bias training and a listing of various resources accessed through the schools' website. Per the interim chair of the Diversity Office at GCSU (2022), GCSU is obliged to have inclusivity within its learning institution; however intentional it is, there is a lack of commitment to creating space for implementation and practice within the music therapy program. For instance, commitment is absent to having a multicultural-social justice stance regarding course design, development, and implementation.

As a burgeoning music therapist who identifies as a Black woman, I understand that culture signifies multiplicity within an individual, which gives a voice to those who feel their identity is not represented and informs their authenticity. Culture plays a vital role because it often centers around people, like Black folx, who have been pushed to the periphery and treated appallingly. Unfortunately, within music's therapeutic arena, the intersections of culture do not mirror each other as they relate to shared experiences. Moreover, there are disparate views when

it comes to how culture, inclusion, and equity are approached and addressed. For instance, Eurocentrism abounds in the music therapy profession and trickles into their programs for higher learning, where the silencing of other views is not considered. Thus, my autoethnography will speak on my racialized experiences at GCSU and show how the manifestations of racial trauma took a toll on me. Writing about my experiences will also allow me to exercise my agency to challenge the dominant narratives. By rewriting the story of our and my community, I create a safe space and gain the empowerment to see the world differently.

During my matriculation, there was only one class taken that briefly addressed topics of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion. In particular, the course of study was Gender and Cultural Issues in Creative Arts Therapies. Remarkably, this course was not only inclusive and diverse as it "intertwined" the topics of gender, culture, and the other intersections of social identities but was also an all-encompassing course that demonstrated a need to "be more arts-centered" (Robinson, 2021, p. 4). In brief, this course was an accelerated one, lasting only four weeks and offered only in the summer. Undoubtedly, student outcomes were met with the aim of providing a safe space to critique and analyze the historical, political, and socio-cultural identities in society. The instructor provided a virtual forum for scholars to openly share their thoughts about the assigned readings and present our final project, incorporating a cultural immersive experience. Even though this course had commendable moments that enriched my cultural understanding, I still felt it lacked depth. Our virtual in-class discussion was not very engaging or profound, perhaps due to the sensitive or controversial nature of the topics that hindered open dialogue. There was, however, a time when I needed to tactfully speak up about the issues of white privilege, which is a form of systemic racism that benefits the dominant structures over Black people.

I suggest framing a multicultural-social justice perspective course, which would have been beneficial for both my peers and myself. Such a course would help to develop an understanding of the various forms of power, privilege, and oppression that exist in the world. It would also challenge the harmful effects of white supremacist ideology, which promotes the superiority of white people over Black people (Beliso-De Jesus & Pierre, 2020; Liu, 2017). This approach would promote a "more inclusive understanding of the links between various forms and expressions of discrimination," disrupting oppressive behaviors and challenging the effects of white supremacist ideology, thus allowing music therapists to be effective clinicians, which reflects and highlights society's elusive association of a multiethnic and racial melting pot (Macey & Moxon, 1996, p. 309). The very idea of including such a lens is pivotal to cultivating a space for clients, therapists, scholars, clinical instructors, and all within the profession to recognize individual differences and foster appreciation based on values, skills, and abilities.

The method of authoring my thesis is autoethnography, as Goodall (2000) stated, a "creative narrative shaped out of a writer's personal experience within a culture and addressed to academic and public audiences" (p. 9). I selected this format because it offers my own "systematic sociological introspection" that encourages me to provide an enriched analysis of my worldview experience concerning the larger social structures (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 737). The social structures of whiteness function as the ideological identity and that which disenfranchises and dominates targeted communities, particularly the black community. The objective of my writing is to introduce a review of literature meant to explore and give further clarity on oppressive systems, ideologies, and theories that can be used as an approach in music therapy pedagogy. My goals are to offer insight into my lived experience as a scholar at GCSU and augment the voiceless. It is my hope that the outcomes of centering and affirming my voice

and suggesting that curriculum readjustments involve frameworks of critical race theory (CRT) and multicultural-social justice that empower those who are reading and that my autoethnography will add value to the discourses of the music therapy program at GCSU and profession.

**Statement of problem**

There is talk about multiculturalism and social justice; however, with the global pandemic of the virus and racial pandemic, my curiosity about these topics has grown tenfold in an abbreviated period as it relates to my educational experience at GCSU. The aftermath of these pandemics revealed the social, cultural, and political inequities of a failed system. Antiblackness portrayed in the homes of the masses challenged the dominant structures to do something that was marked and obvious to counteract the predictability of evilness in white supremacy and other white ethnic communities. The events that took place on the screen were a lie to the post-racial notion of diversity and equity. The killing of an innocent man was a prime example of diversity without equity, where multiple strains of racial tyranny were articulated on the bodies of black women and men.

Within the educational arena of music therapy, I began to probe. My query allowed me to delve inward and notice that my educational experience was all performative at GCSU, whereby I embodied the expected ideals of the dominant power structures. As I reflect on this autoethnography, I realize that the oppressive constraints of having to conform, demonstrate competence, and participate were all a performance so that I did not interrupt order or routine. As such, navigating the tensions of acceptance and rejection, my blackness is whittled down to an inferior status that is unseen and lost in the sea of whiteness. My very essence and personhood are viewed as problematic, and my sense of belonging is further diminished. Traversing the

hallways of GCSU, I manage the microaggressions of the dominant structures, questioning my worthiness, whether it be implicit or explicit; I am met with questions that ask where I came from and why I am here. There is a sense of isolation felt, often an internal question about whether my contributions matter and whether I am good enough. In hindsight, I was uncomfortable being my unapologetic self? What am I masquerading? Who am I kidding? I have come to the realization and acceptance that it was the daily stressors, the racial trauma of having to traverse the hallways of GCSU.

Accordingly, this method of writing serves to explore how the impacts of racial trauma shaped my experiences at GCSU and demonstrate how the consequences of these racialized experiences have impacted me. Understanding this context through the expression of truth, my goal is to empower other related voices, provide a clear view of how my cultural identity is shaped within the educational arena, and examine my experiences of racist assaults, which have played a significant role in impacting my mental health outcomes. While centering myself, beliefs, and reactions through this research, I endeavor to encourage critical discourse about the relevance of including Black voices such as my own and other Black scholars in academic spaces. Furthermore, I feel it is essential to capture my view to help develop culturally relevant and anti-oppressive frameworks that will inform pedagogical teaching and practice. My experience as a scholar of music therapy who identifies as a Black woman explores areas in research that have little information that conveys a picture of how racialized experiences can manifest into traumatic experiences and can ultimately affect my mental well-being.

For the purposes of this autoethnography, I will reveal how I have navigated my experiences at GCSU as a scholar of music therapy and demonstrate how the effects of racial trauma have impacted me. The research questions that have guided my study were:

1. How have the impacts of racial trauma influenced my experiences at GCSU?
2. What were the consequences of these racialized experiences?

# Chapter 2
# Literature Review

## Racial Trauma

Racial trauma transcends individual experience as it is experienced culturally. Unfortunately, the source of the Black community's shared experiences is common oppression and racial trauma. Within these systems of oppression, blackness is viewed as a stain on society, one that is rife with decadence, dependency, and generational trauma. Ogunyemi (2021) stated that "blackness is created by whiteness simply because…of what is at the centre of whiteness, as that which supposed to live, and blackness, being dispensable to life" (p. 7). This very notion allows the mechanism of racial superiority to reign supreme while the injustices leave generations of Black people removed from their identities. The idea that race is a social construct is often weaponized in mass consumption and is futile. When race is introduced, it should be qualified for its importance and effect on the black community. Race still has consequences, and it is a marker for who was enslaved and for who was not, for who could own (homes and businesses), and who could gain access to other resources. Racism is about power and privilege where resources are systematically channeled to those who socially identify as white and are coordinated in a way that others are deprived of. Carter (2007) wrote that "everyday racism is enacted through direct and indirect means in which indirect enactments occur in the development and application of policy and procedures as well as in media portrayals of blacks" (p. 22). There is a link to these socializing inventions that demonstrates the complexities of trauma and how the historical wounds leave an indelible mark that carries over "intergenerational experiences of individuals in society" (Cenat, 2023, p. 677).

By definition, Dr. DeGruy (2005) operationalized post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) as a "theory that explains the etiology of many of the adaptive survival behaviors in African

American communities throughout the United States and the Diaspora" (p. 113). In her assertions, she extended that PTSS is a "condition that exist[s] as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery" (p. 113). Within the historical context of race, racism, discrimination, power, privilege, oppression, and influence, these constructs create an intense layer of stress for me insofar as the intensity is experienced on a day-to-day basis. This layered experience can be identified as racial trauma, also referred to as race-based traumatic stress, which is emotional and psychological distress to racial abuse (Carter & Pieterse, 2020) where "real or perceived experiences" produce harm or injury through direct and or vicarious exposure (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019, p. 1). New evidence supports the notion that intra- and intergenerational trauma can impact the "expression of the gene" because the "chemical signals in the cells activate or turn off specific genes," which "regulate stress later in life" (Rosenwald et al., 2023, p. 628). In other words, racial trauma and epigenetics are entwined by psychological, physical, and emotional stressors, which cause epigenetic changes to the structure of genes. In the Black community, there are centuries of unaddressed trauma that still manifests partly due to the ongoing social injustices.

The phenomenon of racial trauma for psychology theorists Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) categorized this emotional injury to be akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (DSM-5), concluding that although racism can be a traumatic response, other traumatic incidences are equally as traumatic. They, however, supported the notion that microaggressions "make the experience of racist-incident-based-trauma complex and unique" (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005, p. 578). It was later revealed in academic scholarship that racial trauma could be

conceptualized as an emotional response, noting that racial trauma is "unique in that it involves ongoing individual and collective injuries due to exposure and reexposure to race-based stress" (Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz et al., 2019, p. 1; Pieterse et al., 2023). Characterized by its mental health impacts, the consequences of racial trauma are exhibited but not limited to spiritual and emotional distress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, low self-esteem, cognitive alterations, and insecure attachments (Cenat, 2023). In a study conducted by Hemmings and Evans (2018), 106 counselors were surveyed to understand their experiences with identifying and addressing race-based trauma. The study revealed that the leading factors contributing to racial trauma were covert and overt acts of racism, hate crimes, institutional racism, microaggressions, racial discrimination, and racial profiling (Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Regarding music therapy, there is a dearth of research focusing on the experiences and perceptions of student music therapists (SMTs), particularly Black music therapists, and comparatively little research concerning social justice practices within the curriculum and educational programs. Most existing literature highlights clients and the power differential music therapists hold. As academic scholarship relates to racial trauma, there is only one case study that examines race-based traumatic stress and how music therapy can assist in countering its effect on teens of color (Holly, 2022). Race-related trauma was noted as a variable to consider within trauma-informed music therapy. In her chapter, Holly (2022) expanded the meaning of race-based traumatic stress using existing research; she described the elements of race-based trauma and its impact on teens of color. Holly (2022) also examined how the intervention of therapeutic songwriting can be an act of resistance and resilience for teens of color regarding their identity formations. Holly's (2022) work highlights the expressive aspect of therapeutic songwriting for teens to emote their stories safely and creatively.

With the recent egregious acts of innocent black women and black men getting shot with impunity, it is as if my/our wounds are being reopened, and this is difficult and troublesome to endure. Each atrocity witnessed is truly a deplorable historical injury carried across multiple generations that haunts me. My visceral reaction to a system founded and formed with an expressed order to commit harm intentionally is one of fury. The countless strain of racial tyranny is articulated in the brutalization of black bodies and are examples of diversity without equity. And again, this is my racial trauma. In this system, the one that oppresses and destroys life, I earnestly ask myself and those who share my experience, how am I (are you) feeling? Dr. DeGruy (2005) asserted that the condition of PTSS leads to low self-esteem, a marked propensity for anger and violence, and internalized racism. Often, I am emotionally and psychologically depleted, containing a mixed bag of feelings that express disgust, upset, suspicion, numbness, and fury to continue going. Yet I must continue? Am I thriving or surviving? The latter is my current life, but I am striving for the former. These questions seem benign, but gravity holds weight on my shoulders and others who share my experience.

There is this notion of resiliency within the Black community; resiliency rings true, but what does it mean, and how is it actualized? Resiliency becomes a synonymous term when referencing the plight of Black people. Range et al. (2018) explained that it is the ability to maintain emotional and physical well-being in the face of trauma and helps to anticipate and prepare for adverse life events and persist in the face of adversity (p. 289). Resiliency is realized by personal attributes that include “intelligence, hardiness, personal perseverance, and commitment to learning from hardships,” as well as it is ingrained “in the interaction of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors” (Range et al., 2018, p. 289). Is resilience a badge of honor? Often, the stereotype of the angry Black woman can be used as criticism or even

the Strong Black Woman phenomenon, where resiliency is equated to survival and resistance that are not a choice. For me, the symptoms of racial trauma are responses to a system that perpetuates an enslaved structure that chooses to uphold power and privilege to those who socially fall under whiteness and subjugate Blackness. So, how does this fit into my purview?

**The Strong Black Woman**

I hear echoes of voices chanting, "*Black Girl Magic!"* "*Black Girls Rock!"* is like a mantra that embodies strength. I also hear the matriarchs of my family and other Black women vocalizing, "*You are worthy and capable of withstanding any adversity that comes your way!"* praise that I would hear as an expression of survival, self-reliance, and resiliency. It is almost as if I must assume the role of a Superwoman, which limits my humanness and emotional needs. This takes me back to a time when I was a little girl and when it was ingrained in me *to work twice as hard as everyone else* (harder than the power structures) for the mere fact that I am Black and I am a female, and so, my sacrifice, my humanity, and unconditional positive regard for whom I have to plod along gruelingly. Why can't I just be?! It is incredibly appalling, maddening, and irksome to accept this "cultural mandate" requesting that I must arduously labor through (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007, p. 37). My toughness is mistaken for a shield sheathed in "dignity, grace, and composure" to buffer against a world rife with racial, sociopolitical, and economic domination (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007, p. 39). Certainly, this armoring is performative, all in the name of perseverance, all in the name of coping with stress on my own, all in the name of giving to others without expecting help. This façade I present to the world does not allow me to be free, expressive, visible, womanly, or vulnerable.

This veneer, this armor, is not healthy; it has robbed me of any vulnerabilities, and asking for help, I may just subscribe to this racial and gendered trope of being the Strong Black Woman

(Nelson et al., 2016). History dictates that this stereotype is characterized by playing the role of "the nurturing, asexual, overly selfless ''mammy''; the argumentative, highly hostile, emasculating ''sapphire''; the lazy, dependent ''welfare queen''; and the sexually promiscuous ''jezebel'' (Nelson et al., 2016, p. 2). These controlling images and denigrating traits are primary signifiers of how Black women have been and are viewed in society (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007). From its origins that were rooted in the time of enslavement, the portrayal of Black women has been perceived as psychologically and physically stronger compared to White women to rationalize the vicious violence and treatment (Nelson et al., 2016). The justification for cruelty reflects the belief that Black women can readily tolerate agony and ruthless conditions (Nelson et al., 2016). As a result, the image of Black women has become synonymous with strength and defined by survival (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007).

Grappling with the tensions at GCSU and having to negotiate the ideals of black womanhood, especially the Strong Black Woman belief, I was met with responses from peers that can be perceived as favorable, like "*I do not know how you are able to do it,"* "*Your tenacity to continue is commendable*," and "*I am just amazed that you are still here*." These comments were made three semesters after enrollment into the graduate-equivalency program and then having to share my circumstances with professors and peers. I pride myself on compartmentalizing the pressure and stress that comes my way, but I realize that the consequence of this perceived strength is detrimental to my health. Observations such as those mentioned highlighted the expectation that I have uncompromising strength, unyielding independence and that I am a diligent worker. When, in fact, I was laden with the physiological (elevated blood pressure), physical (frequent headaches), and psychological (overeating) manifestations of trying to cope with my situation. Consequently, I must oscillate between two

identities - being the Strong Black Woman and existing as a Black Woman – with little to no separation.

**Racial Microaggressions**

Racial microaggressions are a component of discrimination and are described as verbal and nonverbal racial slights and insults aimed at a person of a marginalized group (Sue, 2011). Microaggressions are the result of implicit biases, like racism, where the affronts typically go unnoticed by subtle tones and ambiguous messages. Under the guise of innocence, nebulous remarks like questioning a black student's academic ability, enduring the burden of an instructor calling on the token black scholar to provide perspective on their lived experience, hearing unsolicited critiques on the manner in which a scholar speaks, or a scholar denying their racial biases through attempts of connecting their gender oppression to my racial oppression are some of the examples of how these slights are difficult to identify. Remarks of this nature are not isolated events where intention does not imply impact; rather, they are actual events in which intention is realized and means hurt, pain, and harm. Far too often, the offender never seems to acknowledge the offense, viewing the slights as "banal and trivial" (Sue et al., 2008, p. 329). Microaggressions have a macro impact because they are cumulative, and the "cumulative impact of many events is traumatic and detrimental to the recipient" (Sue et al., 2008, p. 329). Under the cloak of favorable expression, these offenses are dismissive in nature, rejecting the feelings and reality of myself and other Black scholars. Often, these statements result in a feeling of confusion and beg me to question how I should process this microaggression.

Researchers have begun exploring the actual experiences of students of color, as well as Black scholars' experiences of racial trauma in higher education, to highlight their physiological and psychological outcomes. According to Truong and Museus (2012), 26 doctoral students of

color reported experiencing discriminatory, oppressive, and microaggressive acts, which led to psychosomatic pains (like “stomach pains,” “physical paralysis,” …depression) and feelings of “anger, shock, self-doubt, depression, dissociation, and spiritual pain” (p. 237 & 239). Similarly, Ogunyemi et al.’s (2020) systematic review of microaggressions in higher learning indicated that “90% of African Americans” experienced daily racial discrimination in the form of microaggressions “compared with 21% of whites” at various predominantly white institutions (p. 98). To address this issue, educators and those in leadership can guide scholars through these racially traumatic experiences by helping and acknowledging them. Their review showed that the frequent encounters have a deleterious effect on black students' psychological and emotional well-being, where feelings of “self-doubt, discouragement, frustration, exhaustion” and experiencing “second-class citizenship by being questioned, ridiculed, made to feel invisible, and ignored” (Ogunyemi et al., 2020, p. 100). Finally, research from Nadal et al. (2019) revealed that a racially diverse sample of people of color indicated that respondents in the school setting reported a greater frequency of racial microaggressions, which “can be detrimental and potentially traumatizing” (p. 12). Reported findings were significantly associated with greater traumatic stress symptoms and resulted in school microaggressions being the type that was associated with traumatic symptoms.

**Anti-Blackness**

Since the inception of the collegiate system, enslaved Africans were forced to build and serve in institutions for higher learning (Wilder, 2013). Chronologically, there was the perpetuation of policies that allowed for the erasure of American indigenous people and resulted in the “negation of Black humanity” (Dancy et al., 2018, p. 188). Dancy et al. (2018) asserted that there is a “continuum of structural violence” that reinforces and connects various forms of

violence to one another (p.180). This notion of "structural violence" is endemic and speaks to the modern-day atrocities where Black people are shot with impunity daily by the hands of police and the lack of equity and inclusive policies in colleges. What binds the two acts of structural violence is the biased system of the school-to-prison pipeline. A system that impugns severely and pushes students out of the educational arena while turning a blind eye to the more complex and underlying issues. The promotion of anti-Blackness is representative of the embedded oppressive practices and repressive systems of the American university system and shows how it is given validity (Dancy et al., 2018).

This anti-Blackness deliberately subjugates and dehumanizes me, denying me of my uniqueness and rich history. It serves as the catalyst for centuries of present-day negative experiences that have amassed and endured. It is believed by the social powers who reign supreme that Blackness "is constructed as always already a problem – as nonhuman; inherently uneducable" and "unrecognizable as human, and therefore there is no social or political relationship to be fostered or restored" rather than recognizing "black humanness" (Dumas, 2016, p. 14, 16). This phenomenon, in which Blackness is positioned as a problem and denied humanity, reiterates the racial traumas that are cast on me and those who identify as Black. Dumas (2016) argued that "the aim of theorizing antiblackness is not to offer solutions to racial inequality, but to come to a deeper understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black" (p. 13). Antiblackness is a well-crafted and intricate mechanism for the inequities that left generations of black people removed from their identities and a means through which practices and policies in the educational system maintain the status quo.

**White Supremacy**

The origin of White supremacy is rooted in the humiliation and degradation of the black community as well as the other intersections of their identities. There is a stigma against blackness, where whiteness is the operating, ideological identity of the social structure. White supremacy is hideous and absolute. It functions, it enables, and it breathes "social and political control" (Beliso-De Jesus & Pierre, 2020, p. 1). The tyranny and terror of this "international power system" will turn on itself to satisfy its' own thirst for greed and revenge (Beliso-De Jesus & Pierre, 2020, p. 1). Systemic reign is what legitimizes the ideology, not only extremist hate groups but a global influence that is a "political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions" (Ansley, 1997, p. 592). White supremacy has done damage to everyone, and it is in the imaginations of how humankind exists.

The Black community is taught that the nation is founded on a belief in a hierarchy of human values and to not uproot that belief with every generation that is created. The obscuring of race and of Blackness is informed by years of thinking, organizing, and working on the acquisition of white supremacy. It is White supremacy's toxic unintelligence, patriarchy, narcissism, misogynoir, capitalistic economy, sexist, and colonialist embodiment that goes against every fiber that is human. The pattern of White supremacy is to perpetuate a legacy of inequality at the cost of racism and to justify it as the normative action for social equality.

Society operates in certain structures that keep privileges functioning. Privilege is quantifiable and palpable; it speaks to the advantages of the majority as it calls attention to the disadvantages of the Black community; however, the impact of racism affects us all. It is often

difficult to see, but the white community is the benefactor of White supremacy, and the harsh irony is that White supremacy destroys the cultural fabric for everyone. As Liu (2017) asserts, White supremacy gives the illusion of power, "endorsing meritocratic beliefs" that result in the maintenance of the status quo and "support for inequality…versus egalitarian beliefs that elevate social justice values" (p. 353). White supremacy is a daily problem that permeates through the cracks of society and refuses to acknowledge that the inaudible cries and moans are not to be amplified by the empathy of whiteness. Seeping through the invisible spaces of higher education, white supremacy denies any funding and power– philosophical beliefs and policies- it usurps curriculum, professors, and others in leadership who do not reflect the student body, thus reinforcing dominant narratives. Society and social opinion narrate that Blackness is parenthetical to white society. To become invested in pushing back against anti-Blackness and thus dismantling white supremacy, everyone must find and appreciate the actual value of the Black experience. As Hamer (1971) exclaimed, "Nobody's free until everybody's free," and as Singh (2020) declared, "…in working for Black liberation we all get free" (p. 1112). True liberation looks like a full acceptance of Black humanity and holding the music therapy program accountable for its role in perpetuating anti-Black narratives, taking steps to revolutionize the educational system, and "decolonize and re-indigenize" ideologies as a profession (Singh, 2020, p. 1115).

**Critical Race Theory**

Delving into a lens that calls for growth with an increased level of consciousness, one approach to take is to explore critical race theory (CRT) as a framework to engage and identify a space in practice and instruction for scholars of music therapy who are compelled to make allowances for others to join the table of inclusion. CRT addresses the sociopolitical injustices

that plague our society, with race and racism at its helm. At its core, CRT focuses on how law, policy, and legislation are imagined, which fundamentally responds to the dominant structures, challenges the oppressive narratives, and analyzes the -isms that reveal the insidious ways discrimination is sedimented into American society. CRT gives meaning to how and why race and racism immobilize subjugated individuals. How can clients, scholars, and music therapists receive each other in their full humanity when oppressive systems exist? Presently, I observe the institutions where pedagogy and training are housed and have witnessed the unsuccessful failings of an inclusive approach to the music therapy profession.

The profession of music therapy is meant to help individuals who experience trauma on a "somatic, physiological, and neurobiological level" and to help express the psychological impacts of their traumatic life events (Ramos-Watts, 2023, p. 3). I suggested a multicultural-social justice and CRT approach be the bridge, which reconfigures fact from ideology so that critical evaluation can be done. Ideology shapes biases and inclinations and rationalizes and maintains the status quo of oppressive structures. Ideology is defined by Brookfield (2005) as "the broadly accepted set of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appear self-evidently true, empirically accurate, personally relevant, and morally desirable" (p. 41). From this point, ideology frames ways of knowing that are detrimental to those who are sidelined and legitimizes perceptions of experience grounded in illusion. CRT is a specific type of ideology that acknowledges the racial inequities that pervade this world and recognizes the intersections of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005).

Founded by legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, CRT was brought about by the interrogation of a fractured legal system and the unconstitutional laws of Jim Crow (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). CRT draws from the "U.S. legal system and is shaped by the way people

think about law, racial categories, and privilege" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p.9). The sole purpose of the CRT framework is to address intersectionality, activism, and revisionist history and to understand the system of racial inequalities through storytelling and how the laws might be imagined to address them. Consistent with Delgado and Stefancic (2011), the main ideas of CRT address issues of "school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, affirmative action, high stakes testing, controversies over curriculum and alternative and charter schools" (p. 6). My identity intersects with being a black woman and scholar of music therapy. Thus, my positionality is genderized and racialized, which makes CRT a relevant framework to examine myself in research showing how my intersecting identities mold my experiences at GCSU. To garner an understanding of CRT, it goes without mentioning a provision of the five tenets that will guide this autoethnography, particularly the tenet of counter-storytelling. The first tenet speaks to the notion that "racism is ordinary, not aberrational" and explains how systemic racism is embedded in the cracks of educational institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Tenet two, "interest convergence or material determinism," describes the concept that sidelined communities only benefit when the power structures find it favorable and beneficial to advance the marginalized group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8). The third tenet, "social construction," pronounces that social groupings are contrived formations rather than a reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8). The fourth tenet, "intersectionality and anti-essentialism," states that "each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9). The last tenet, "unique voice of color," is a method of "counter storytelling" where narratives of the silenced voices can be expressed to help promote social justice and expose preconceived conceptions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 10). It is through this powerful medium of narration that my "unique voice of color" will address my experiences to legitimize my voice and the unheard (Delgado & Stefanic,

2011, p. 10). CRT is a frame to use within the music therapy program to present my experience as a black woman scholar to legitimize the oppressive systems that exist within the academic institution of GCSU.

For decades, budding literature has addressed the need and use for adopting CRT, yet the work is only talked about on a micro level - practice or in theory (Hadley, 2013; Leonard, 2020, 2020). Hadley (2013) utilized CRT to illustrate that the pervading narratives position identities and shape the experiences of educators, clients, and clinicians. She argued that music therapists "be aware of the multiple ways in which we are complicit with dominant narrative in our professions, our education and training, and in our practice" (Hadley, 2013, p. 379). To further emphasize CRT's need in the music therapy profession, Leonard (2020) also exposed the dominant narratives and beckoned for the "centering equity" of black clients and for music therapists to "practice a critical consciousness that actively uses counterhegemonic and antiracist practices" (p. 109-110). CRT is a resourceful method to use as it seeks to bring awareness of societal inequities that are widespread and universal.

As I continue to research a clear definition for CRT, I am learning that CRT is very nuanced. It incorporates various generations of critical theorists who respond to their specific contexts due to the political ideologies of their time. For the purposes of this autoethnography, I am referring to CRT as it relates to race and racism. Since race and racism were absent in the discourses of law, critical race theory emerged. By addressing these narratives, a critical analysis should be conducted where CRT becomes a functional framework in practice. CRT is a probable approach to use in tandem with a multicultural-social justice stance.

**Espousing a Multicultural and Social Justice Framework**

Since global diversity will change the landscape of America, multiculturalism and social justice are two complementary constructs that can be used to create more equitable educational experiences in music therapy pedagogy. The authors Hadley and Norris (2016) proposed that music therapy pedagogical teaching and training should be guided by interdisciplinary professions of psychology and social work and that multicultural competency and social justice are ethical obligations for music therapy pedagogy. The challenges lie in educating scholars with the necessary skills to connect with clients' sociopolitical-historical-cultural needs therapeutically and to understand "the personal and musical cultural biases that the therapist brings into the music therapy context" (Hadley & Norris, 2016, p. 129). Nadal et al. (2019) and Young (2016) also support this notion.

Music therapy espouses the need for music therapists to be culturally competent, as evidenced by the AMTA's Professional Competencies, which ensure that "quality of education and clinical training" is established (2023). AMTA (2023) emphasizes the importance of the music therapist selecting "effective cultural[ly]-based methods" for assessment. Failure to teach and provide culturally sensitive interventions can aid in the misinterpretations of culture and steer an SMT down a path that becomes a disservice to potential clients. Multicultural competence is a complex and ongoing process that involves understanding one's identity and the historical-sociopolitical structures of clients, scholars, and instructors. According to Young (2016), it is an "ongoing re-conceptualization" that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of identity and the importance of historical-sociopolitical structures in the "musical context" (p. 127). The literature suggests that while competencies present multiculturalism and social justice as ethical obligations, educators are struggling to understand how to integrate these necessities.

Since before the formation of the AMTA, there have been several pioneers in the profession who have introduced topics in multiculturalism from the standpoint of "interest in cultural differences" Pancaro (1971); Johnston (1973); and Kovach (1985). Among the other pioneers are scholars who have published about "specific cultures or the cultures' music" (Darrow & Molloy, 1998, p. 28). Other academics have contributed to the topic of adopting multiculturalism and brought awareness to the importance of multicultural pedagogy. These academics include Moreno (1988, 1990-1994), Toppozada (1995), Darrow & Molloy (1998), and Wyatt & Furioso (2000).

Culturally relevant and anti-oppressive approaches are important in pedagogical training and practice rooted in social justice and other reflexive frameworks like CRT. Consideration of these approaches can address and build competence in working in a diverse environment, decolonizing systems of oppression, and recognizing the intersecting identities of an individual (French et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2022; Pieterse et al., 2009). Accompanied by the adoption of a multicultural frame, the construct of a social justice framework seeks to center marginalized voices, resist overlapping systems of oppression like microaggression, discriminatory acts, racial trauma, and structures that are in place to influence an individual's mental stability (French et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2019; Quinn & Grumbach, 2015). As a result, there has been a new generation of published scholars in the music therapy profession who are calling attention to training and praxis in multiculturalism and social justice. These music therapists are Hadley (2013), Hadley & Norris (2016), Baines & Edwards (2018), Norris (2020), Webb & Swamy (2020), Leonard (2020), Thomas & Norris (2021), Gombert (2022). However, these practitioners continue to note the same cyclical roadblocks that the profession fails to meet, such as the notion of theorizing rather than enacting.

Toppozada (1995) studied 298 global music therapists to examine their knowledge, attitudes, and relevance and determine if training in multiculturalism is necessary (Darrow & Molloy, 1998; Wyatt & Furioso, 2000). The study found that music therapy program still struggles to provide students with the necessary tools and skills to be well-rounded clinicians despite the need for pedagogy in multiculturalism and social justice to "reduce the danger of stereotyping and misunderstanding in the therapeutic process" (Toppozada, 1995, p. 69). If multicultural pedagogy intends to validate individual differences, acknowledge the educator's role in shaping a scholar, and "eventually develop *their* own pluralistic philosophies," why isn't there any more effort to act in being culturally responsive and inclusive (Toppozada, 1995, p. 84)? In Toppozada's (1995) study, the data revealed strong support for culturally sensitive training and agreed that integrating a multicultural approach into existing music therapy courses is preferred. More effort is needed to get the results of making changes and dismantling the dominant paradigm of Eurocentrism. Maintaining the point that more training in multiculturalism is needed, Darrow and Malloy's (1998) survey study found that respondents remarked that their "coursework was very inadequate" (p. 31). They believed that anyone working in this field should receive more extensive training in multicultural music as well as other multicultural areas such as "social issues and developing therapeutic relationships" (p. 31). To date, multicultural training has not been "responsive and thorough in addressing" multicultural issues, and more research and training are needed (Darrow & Molloy, 1998, p. 30).

Notably, evidence is supported by qualitative data from a study conducted by Singh et al. (2010) regarding 66 doctoral trainees in the counseling psychology profession, which revealed that 85% of the trainees did not take a course on social justice issues, and there were pedagogical deficits with integrating social justice into "course work and clinical training" (p. 785). As such,

Hemmings and Evans's (2018) study examined 106 mental health professionals and found that participants did not have training in racial trauma. The data revealed a call to action to push back anti-Blackness and dismantle white supremacist ideologies. According to a meta-analytic study by Pieterse et al. (2009), the constructs of multicultural competence and social justice training must be clearly defined "while acknowledging the overlap" (p. 108). Their findings found that most multicultural courses and social justice training in counselor education and counseling psychology contained a three-way model that is" characterized by the development of knowledge, awareness, and skills as they relate to the ability to work in racially and ethnically diverse" settings (Pieterse et al., 2009, p. 95).

Over 15 years later, Hadley and Norris (2016) implored music therapists to act upon a "transformational process of unlearning" and relearning to acquire cultural competency and achieve a more culturally sensitive practice (p. 134). This lifelong process was delineated in a three-step linear sequence. First, music therapists must possess self-awareness, which involves introspection of self-identity and the positionality of the music therapist's continual exploration and reflection of their own biases. Second, in the subsequent step of transformational learning, music therapists need to gain cultural knowledge through an awareness of society's diverse cultures. Through this second progression, music therapists should learn about the client's culture and music, whereby their very humanness is holistically "experienced and perceived cross-culturally" (Hadley & Norris, 2016, p. 131). Finally, in their last transformational process, Hadley and Norris (2016) emphasized the need to develop skills, which suggested that music therapists apply their transformational insights through therapeutic intervention to foster mutual empathy and a stronger therapeutic alliance. This sequential approach encourages liberatory and

anti-oppressive processes to develop as they relate to “discrimination, marginalization, stigma, and inequity” (Peters et al., 2022, p. 512).

In the vein of exploring reflexive practices, another framework in music therapy that espouses the values of inclusion and anti-oppressive practices is social justice. Grounded in the theories of the helping profession of social work, social justice calls for a “focus on inequality as a social form that shapes life changes for people in ways that are more profound (more “unequal”) than simply different” (Adams et al., 2013, p. 1). From a social justice lens, I am aware of my positionality as a woman who is of Afro-Caribbean heritage and the many-layered complexities to which I belong. I have lived, worked, and traveled to places that were both homogenous and multicultural in settings. From the schools I have attended, to the instructors I have had, and to the clients I have served, all represent the multiplicity of society. Since the reawakening of the atrocities, society’s sociopolitical landscape shifted; it is important to recognize how power, privilege, oppression, influence, and race impact clinicians, educators, scholars, and clients.

At GCSU, having a curriculum rooted in this approach could broaden the student music therapist’s role by being an agent of social, cultural, historical, and political change through advocacy and empowerment for clients, scholars, and professionals. Orienting academic scholarship in social justice affords a more inclusive curriculum that speaks to cultural humility, which not only highlights tolerance of culture but truly applies a critical lens that invites a “genuine curiosity and desire” to understand the client’s culture (Gombert, 2022, p. 170).

At GCSU, my educational experience regarding multicultural instruction was lacking; as previously discussed, the only course that introduced multiculturalism was Gender and Cultural Issues in Creative Arts Therapies. Interestingly enough, the music therapy program calls for only

the maintenance of the status quo, using language like diversity, equity, inclusion, and culturalism to cloak under indifference, omission of facts, and oblivion, which often are fueled with a body of thoughts that are filled with ambiguous stereotypes. Indeed, a few great discussions addressed classmates' lived-in experiences related to the various articles read, but in hindsight, the nexus between gender, culture, and music therapy was not there. To highlight this point even further, participants in Gombert's (2022) phenomenological study noted that cultural awareness was perceived through a Eurocentric lens that only viewed *culture* as having a "tolerance of other races and cultures." This very practice reinforced insensitivity to inclusivity and obtaining a multicultural-social justice stance. As a result, there is a lack of supporting literature to ground inclusivity with a sustained approach to a multicultural-social justice frame that can be "consistently identified and equitably addressed" within the higher learner institution and profession (Peters et al., 2022, p. 512; Webb & Sangeet, 2020).

Evidenced by the aforementioned studies, the music therapy profession requires more professional literature that addresses topics in [multi]cultural competency, social justice training, and frameworks, as well as explores the lived experiences of Black scholars' experiences of racial trauma in higher educational settings. The current literature in the music therapy profession is limited in capturing the adverse consequences of racialized experiences of Black scholars who must navigate higher learning institutions is scant. Additionally, research on multicultural and social justice frameworks that promote culturally sensitive and inclusive music therapists who adhere to the AMTA's Code of Ethics is scant.

# Chapter 3
# Methodology

## My Role, The Emerging Data

I aim to bring awareness to my racially traumatic experiences that have been presented to me directly and vicariously within the educational arena at GCSU. I also sought to explore my views and emphasize how the racial disparities within the educational arena have colored and shaped my lens. The findings of this autoethnography will contribute to the limited body of research, which speaks to the amplification of my Black voice within the music therapy program. It is my belief that my insights can strengthen the relevance and provide a sense of empowerment while informing others who share a similar experience or those who express a curiosity to understand what it was like to attend a higher learner institution that continues to endorse white supremacist ideology. In my assertions, I hope to bring a nuanced understanding of how my experiences at GCSU can help shape and contribute to the music therapy program by validating the experiences of others who share similar experiences but serve as a linchpin to amplify voices for those who are rendered invisible. This chapter will delineate specific information related to how I structured this autoethnography, including my positionality, how the emerging data will be collected, and lastly, how the data will be analyzed.

## Autoethnography

Through my voice and experiences, I will recount my journey and share my narrative using the methods of autoethnography. Autoethnography will be used as a valuable approach to capture and analyze my experiences at GCSU. This method of writing allows me to reveal my authentic voice, where reflection from past and present events will be illuminated through the demonstration of the impacts of racial trauma directly on me. My remembrances are the introspective views that contain an evolved view of my life. Peering into this window allows the

reader to see the "unveiling self" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 7) and the "striping away [of] the veneer of self-protection…to make self-accountable [for] and vulnerable to the public" (Denzin, 1999, p. 568). Contrary to an autobiography, which is a story of oneself, an autoethnography pulls from multiple data sources, "connecting the personal to the cultural" and bridging the "macro and micro linkages" of critical reflection. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739; Wall, 2016, p. 2). Likewise, Foster et al. (2006) described autoethnography as "a qualitative research method that connects the researchers' personal self to the broader cultural context. Evocative writing is where the writer shares personal stories on their own experiences that are used to extend understanding of a particular social issue" (p. 44). This very definition gives an authentic voice to my story's subjective and critical nature.

To present my story, autoethnography positions me directly in the middle of my research as an observer and as a participant. There is an element of self-absorption that is felt and can be cause for concern, but it is necessary for me to self-examine and "connect with the stories of recipients and evoke reflexive moments" to readers (Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016, p. 754). Hughes and Pennington (2017) eloquently asserted that the auto ethnographer "embrace[s] the conflict of writing against oneself as one finds oneself entrenched in the complications of one's position," yet contrary to this air of vanity, this style of writing calls for the use of "broad methodology, the actual methods of research and how it can be represented (p. 8 & p. 17). Similarly, Hughes and Pennington (2017) noted that "autoethnography involves a meaningful phenomenon of interest and considers a critically reflective approach to thinking and writing" (p. 16). It is this method that allows me to use field notes, which are my daily entries, memories, and interpretations from memory.

The power of writing an autoethnography stems from its diversity in presentation and approach. Influenced by critical race theory and guiding my work through a theoretical lens of a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework, the groundwork for analyzing my narrative is the justification for sharing my autoethnography. I structured my procedures in response to the goals of this work by offering insights into my lived-in experience as a scholar at GCSU and to augment the voiceless. I intend:

1. To share, inform, and educate about my experiences as a GCSU scholar, I will share my lived experience with the reader and
2. To promote recommendations for an inclusive music therapy curriculum, the governing bodies can incorporate and/or reframe the curriculum around a multicultural-social justice framework.

I am hopeful that the outcomes of centering and affirming my voice will empower others and encourage critical discourse to occur where curriculum readjustments can involve the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT)-multicultural-social justice with the result of creating an inclusive and equitable learning experience. My writing aims to allow the evocative content to center my voice and give further clarity on the adverse effects of encountering systems of oppression, ideologies, and theories in academia.

**My Role and Positionality**

My existence and presence as a Black woman have positioned me as an insider and an outsider. As an outsider, there is a cultural undertone within the music therapy program at GCSU that challenged my understanding, and as an insider, the stance that this autoethnography will allow me to disseminate facts that are filtered and truthful. The retelling of my story is packaged in such a way that the complexities of my experiences can be articulated and made visible

through the constructions of culture and society. My voice will be used to narrate a personal, reflexive, and exploratory view of my racially traumatic experiences as a burgeoning student music therapist (SMT). In general, I positioned myself in this autoethnography as the central instrument to provide revelation of my feelings that were attached to past and present memory, to allow my voice as a Black woman and SMT to be heard in the sea of dominant voices, and to give recognition of my visibility in the music therapy program. The collection of data and method for analysis will go through an evolutionary process and allow me to use journalling, interpretations from memory, and reflection to capture the experiences of my journey at GCSU (Rodriguez et al., 2017, p. 67-68). Moreover, I will highlight the importance of clearly conveying the boundaries of my autoethnography to the audience. In carrying out my autoethnography, I have previously reviewed various terms related to oppressive systems and ideologies. Lastly, an introduction to conceptual frameworks as an approach in music therapy pedagogy will be presented likewise an organization of how my experience aligns within its context. Based on this understanding, the reader will then be able to garner an understanding of how my experiences at GCSU can help shape and contribute to the music therapy educational arena by validating the experiences of others who share similar experiences. To be impartial, I will diversify my research, continue to consult, and use feedback from my thesis committee.

**The Emerging Data: Design, Collection, Analysis**

During the construction of my autoethnography, I experienced an immense amount of anxiety for the mere fact that I was representing myself and knew that I was the focal point in it. This representation challenges my suggestive writing, for it is through constant introspection and vulnerability that I was able/can expose who I am and unmask the motivations that helped develop and establish placement in my life. It is/was imperative that I present as my authentic

self and just as equally essential to maintain a level of academic integrity where I highlight a reality that has not been considered.

The emergence of my autoethnographical study is/was methodical in its own right; however, the overall research design does not follow the conventional systematic scheme as other qualitative studies. I fashion my research centered on my experiences as an SMT and as a Black woman. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography is a valuable method of writing that "displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). Unlike the typical conventions of qualitative research that are more well-defined, it is arguable whether this genre of writing has any legitimacy in academic scholarship. I affirm that there indeed is room. One of the many advantages of an autoethnography is that it is filled with copious amounts of rich, "thick descriptive" data, which details my subjective experiences with racial trauma and will allow me to express my outlook and feelings in a structured manner (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). One thing is for certain, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to autoethnography methodology; there is space for creativity, growth, and fluidity, but with restraints. The boundaries may be blurred, yet it is a unique tool that "is not highly structured and relies heavily upon the researcher to determine specific procedures" (Cooper & Lilyea, 2021, p. 198). What remains constant is that there are many different types of autoethnography, from analytic autoethnography, collaborative autoethnography, deconstructive autoethnography, indigenous/native ethnographies, and personal narratives to meta-autoethnography (and many more), all of which use a variety of ways to capture the author's reflexive processes.

***Design***

My emerging data will be chronicled in a journal where I express and, at times, confront and investigate my internal struggles when encountering racial discriminatory acts at GCSU. In

the vein of convention and academic formalities, just this once will I concretely say my autoethnography will be written in the version of evocative autoethnography, a creative presentation to deliver my narrative (Spinazola et al., 2021). This way of writing focuses on moving the reader emotionally by using "sociological introspection and emotional recall…to make others care, to affect social change, to call people to action" (Spinazola et al., 2021, p. 34 & 41). Otherwise, my writings can be interpreted as abstract. This form will help interpret and examine my feelings and experiences as my "sensitive issues" "intersects with a cultural context," which is the culture of the dominant structures of GCSU (Mendez, 2013, p. 283 and Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 14). Through this form, oppressive and dominant narratives will be challenged. By using creative storytelling and honoring my own heritage and culture, feelings, insights, and emotions will be explored to demonstrate my worldview.

***Data Collection***

Since the Spring semester of 2023, from January to May, I have engaged in recording data through journalling of fragmented thoughts, observations of myself and peers, and interactions with peers and instructors in the academic sphere. I felt compelled to write. Self-reflexivity (self-analysis), and memories (recall) of my experiences were what I depended on as part of the process for analysis. I have gathered the equivalent of six single-spaced, size 10 font typed pages, coupled with eight pages of college-ruled handwritten entries. In my quest to establish a thesis, I instinctively created titles, such as My Narrative, School Experience, and Possible Solutions, which were written above each memory and real-life view. Based on these categories, I began reading articles about CRT and racial battle fatigue, which then prompted me to investigate the overarching umbrella of racial trauma. Accordingly, my thesis was born. Within this manifestation, the racial-sociopolitical-cultural climate in the United States of

America (USA) also prompted an interest that allowed me to connect racial trauma and my experience at GCSU. So, in my exploration, I compiled a beneficial keyword search; however, I found that using the articles' references was more valuable in my pursuit. As a result, my keyword search comprised of the black music therapy association; autoethnography; autoethnography and racial trauma; racial trauma and or in music therapy; black resiliency and (in) trauma and (in) music therapy; and anti-oppressive framework in therapy, social work, (and music therapy) to name a few.

After weeks of searching and reading, I amassed several scholarly articles, all of which were read, underlined, highlighted, and annotated. Articles were then labeled by their respective groupings – source, quite possible, maybe, maybe not, and definitely not – to simplify the selection process. In my organization, I selected articles that I knew would be satisfactory to strengthen my narrative regarding my racialized status in a Eurocentric higher educational system. My data is emerging but not yet comprehensive, where every act of offense, microaggression, or overt/covert discriminatory act was detailed. In fact, the data serves as an expression for the mentioned transgressions, embodying the most detrimental impacts cast on me and adverse effects on my psychological, physical, emotional, and physiological well-being. I was advised by an instructor not to discard any material; all articles are stored in separate bags until the day of my thesis defense. The creation of my initial outline helped guide me with the organization of thoughts, create linkages for salient points, and help develop transitions for core ideas. I provided definitions for specific terms, words, and phenomena to add context and felt it essential to examine my autoethnography's theoretical underpinnings.

***Data Analysis***

The actual data analysis will include the methods using thematic analysis. Outlined by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase "recursive" guide, my collected data will be interpreted through a classification of themes (p. 16). This analysis method allowed me to utilize data from my journal and observations, which enabled me to document questions that incited introspection and convey meaning and experience as a Black woman and music therapist scholar at GCSU. In their initial phase, Braun and Clark (2006) suggested continuously reviewing and evaluating data, essentially "familiarising [my]self" with the data to identify patterns of meaning and behaviors and or recurring themes or topics that have shaped my experiences (p. 16). Using highlighters and post-its, a few ideas emerged where I began coding concepts such as "undermined," "isolated," "overt/covert," "erasure/exclusion," "antiblack," "ignorance," "acts of discrimination," "lack of diversity," "unknown," and "solutions." This phase was Braun and Clark's (2006) second phase of "generating initial codes" (p. 18). In the subsequent phases of three through five, a three-prong distilling process of reviewing, refining, and renaming, I continuously checked to ensure themes were relevant to my autoethnography. Having to discard a few codes and themes, I could appropriately draw connections through my CRT-multicultural-social justice lens and create overarching themes befitting my research (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 19-22). The final phase involves the adventurous task of "producing the report," which will be accomplished in an organized narrative of my reflections, inner workings, observations, and experiences (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 23). This will describe my encounters (although I have weaved some of my experiences throughout this narrative) with racial discrimination and the racially traumatic effects and how these encounters are systemically embedded in the music therapy program at GCSU.

Due to the nature of this autoethnography, my writing falls prey to the high potential for risk as it relates to trustworthiness and bias. As the sole presenter and researcher of this narrative, the very nature of the self is biased because the content and context are subjective. Opinions and "imaginations" are questionable, which does not lend to an objective stance but rather a subjective one (Enworo, 2023, p. 374). Taking the onus of my biases, beliefs, assumptions, and reliance on memory, I maintain a "reflexive journal" where I can solidify confirmability (Enworo, 2023, p. 378). It is through my reflexive writing that I can unleash my vulnerabilities and be critical in my thought processes by "deconstructing, confronting, theorizing, or challenging oneself to think differently from the dominant frames of thinking" (Poerwandari, 2021, p. 317). Another way to establish validity is with an "audit trail," which shows my research is following a systematic progression where data can be traced "via the decisions made and procedures described" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Using rich "thick description" allows me to mitigate any credibility, dependability, and transferability risks. My rich description calls for much transparency in my writing, demonstrating that the purpose of my research is "logical and transparent" as well as that the data selection is conveyable to meet my research goal (Enworo, 2023, p. 377).

# Chapter 4
# Results

I present my qualitative data analysis anchored in a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework. Under the guidance of this conceptual framework, there will be four themes that contain evocative content, which centers my voice and provides clarity regarding the adverse effects encountered when dealing with systems of oppression, ideologies, and theories within academia. The four overarching themes from my data collection and analysis process are Silenced and Invisible, Anti-Blackness, Erasure, and I Belong Here!

## Silenced and Invisible

To begin addressing my goal of exploring problematic aspects of being silenced within the music therapy program, I felt it necessary to revisit the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Counter-storytelling is a method used to share my narrative as someone who is subjected to the margins of society and who has space to amplify not only my voice but others who are silenced (Yosso et al., 2011). It is understood that within higher education, inequities abound, and so does the maintenance of the status quo, where a race-neutral approach promotes a false rationale of colorblindness and lack of diversity. At the time, I was fully present and under full-time status at Georgia College & State University (GCSU); I felt as if these walls continued to systematically oppress marginalized scholars such as myself by way of silencing and creating an environment that burdened me with exclusion and invisibility. For privacy, each example provided will only contain non-gender-neutral pronouns such as they, them, and their.

Silencing and invisibility are, in fact, glaring; I have been met with declarations from a peer who hinted at the idea that past prejudiced ideologies should not influence present-day beliefs. My classmate dismissively stated, "*Affirmative action is no longer necessary due to fairness in schools*." Like, what?! Calm down…but is the disconnect not apparent enough?! I felt

devalued because of their ignorance of the sociocultural-historical context and felt disregarded for the reason that there were deficits in understanding how oppressive constraints actually affected me in current times. The ostracism that was sensed made me question my position and my identity in relation to theirs – is it possible that they only connected to my racialized self (the self that is lost in the absolutes of how society views and expects me to behave and exist) contrasted to who I am? I was quite alarmed; their lack of knowledge, empathy, and self-awareness baffled me. I could probably use this as a teachable moment, but I do not want to be saddled with having to explain. Is this my role? Will I always be burdened with having to define and create teachable moments? Today will not be the day for this moment, and I do not have the emotional bandwidth to deal with it. If we are scholars in music therapy, should we not be able to reflect and recognize our own biases? Should we not be empathetic to our clients and one another? Maybe this is my own bias and assumption creeping in. This example is emblematic of how my interconnected feelings of exclusion, devaluation, and dismissiveness contribute to feeling like my voice has been suppressed and my identity overlooked.

In this following example, I will show the racial power dynamics between a peer and myself and how their racial insensitivity and curt regard rendered me silenced and invisible. There was an instance of a peer not recognizing nor believing that the stressors of life events took an emotional, physical, and psychological toll on me and thus impacted my readiness for practicum. On that day, I decided to briefly share my experience of workplace discrimination and how the compounding effects of the pandemic and the brutish nature of the police had affected me. With thoughts that they were going to be empathetic, their response stunned me. I was met with, *I'm sure there was something you did to allow that to happen*. I was mortified! I sensed a lapse in my judgment for letting my guard down and sharing a snippet of my personal life. I was

pissed! How dare they assume that I was to blame without considering other factors! I felt horrible and undermined. I questioned my approach to sharing. Why did I share? Why did I FEEL THE NEED to share? Is it conceivable that I felt safe and believed there was an ethnic and cultural-historical connection between the two of us from which we could relate? Evidently, I was mistaken and have completely oversimplified this situation, this connection. Again, there goes my biased assumption; however, the consequence is nuanced. The dismissiveness and arrogance that I felt from their pompous response demonstrated my invisibility. This moment of vulnerability was invalidated, and so I am inclined to ask the music therapy program at GCSU how changes can be made to validate voices and experiences like mine when burgeoning music therapists ignore the impacts of racism and societal oppression. This underestimation further fueled my trauma, my racial trauma, by nullifying my feelings and experience.

The previous example demonstrated how my classmates' pompous remarks contributed to the effects of my emotional distress and how their dismissive comment reinforced their racial power imbalance. This last example will show an unexpected commenter's lack of validation and empathy. About 10 minutes before class time, my peer and I discussed an incident that occurred off-campus. Both of us shared our related grievances about the occurrence; a classmate chimed in to say, "*It is what it is; there is improvement*." Aghast by their intrusion and lack of compassion in response to EVERYTHING! How dare they violate our space and conversation? And, for goodness' sake, where was their understanding? Without uttering a word, I gave them the benefit of the doubt, and most certainly, my facial expression conveyed my thoughts and emotions, which prompted them to justify their claims by saying, "*Well, those things happen because it does*." This very glib and all-encompassing remark rationalized their ignorance and unwavering certainty. I decided to let it go. Incredibly disappointed with myself for not speaking

up, I consciously chose not to respond. My refusal was two-fold: they ignored the boundaries of our conversation, which showed total disregard for our space. Secondly, I felt a visceral feeling welling inside me and a refusal to be described as The Angry Black Woman! It was evident that my classmates' dismissive and cavalier tone escaped them, not fully understanding the scope and depth of the incident. It was through their arrogance, assumptions, and entitlement to their white status that they could assert themselves in our discourse. So, should I chalk it up to age, willful ignorance, or not having a developed language? In retrospect, this was their truth, although it discredited the incident and those impacted by it. They were compelled to respond further, almost as if they needed to defend their position yet again, which only reinforced their lack of understanding of their implicit biases. They stated, "*I have a couple of black friends, my sister's boyfriend is black, and as far as I know, there are no issues."* It was obvious that they thought they were racially tolerant because of their familiarity with their sister's black boyfriend. Oy vey! Still, this "familiarity" did not absolve them from who they potentially are. I do not claim to know them, but the reading was as clear as day; more introspection was needed. Why is there no penalty for such ignorance? Are we not in a helping profession? Are there no criteria for the music therapy program to vet candidates who are totally devoid of compassion? I am increasingly understanding that whiteness via white supremacy is safeguarded through its refusal to consider complicity and by endorsing systemic oppression. These three examples conveyed the sentiments of my invisibility and silencing, which exacerbated my racial trauma.

As Hadley (2016) suggested, to circumvent issues such as the examples given, [student] music therapists (SMTs) should acquire the skills and undertake the "transformational process of unlearning" and relearning to be effective, culturally sensitive therapists (p. 136). To obtain these culturally sensitive skills, it would be beneficial for the music therapy program to involve more

case scenarios that will encourage critical and thoughtful analysis to learn ways to respond to systems of oppression for those who are subjugated. Case scenarios will aid in identifying their personal triggers and cues while allowing SMTs to explore the phenomenological differences of marginalized groups fully. As a result, SMTs would be more familiar with the impacts of race and socio-cultural-historical racism and prejudice and hopefully become reflective and empathetic human beings.

**Anti-Blackness**

Fast forward to the modern day, anti-Blackness shows up in diverse ways. Anti-Blackness rears its ugly head in its dueling forms of implicit and explicit manifestations by wreaking havoc on my psyche. Whether it be through the constant reminders of police brutality, the over-policing of black bodies (black hair, unfair and discriminatory laws that are against the Crowne Act) displayed on social media, through the exclusion of voices and experiences such as my own in academic scholarship; through the reminders of being stopped and questioned by campus security about the legitimacy of my presence on campus; and through self-doubt displayed due to my position in the academic space, I struggle through the gaze of who I am in proximity to the social structures.

From the exclusion of voice and recognizing the microaggressions, I was privy to instructors calling out other black scholars to discuss uncomfortable topics that covered discrimination and racism, expecting black scholars to be the spokesperson for all that is black. I have witnessed and experienced professors and peers call me by the name of other black scholars in class. A repeated offense nonetheless! The mislabeling was redundant and reductive! This was another example that discounted my identity and reduced me to an identity that was imperceptible. There was the burden of having to overcompensate by either toning down my

capabilities in a group setting for fear of being perceived as assertive, rude, or demanding by my peers. Dare I say I was afraid of being labeled as the Strong Black Woman? For instance, I did not assert my opinion about a song in a timely manner that did not align with my cultural or historical beliefs. The song itself was a popular song; however, I felt that this was a missed opportunity to dive deeper into the context of why I was apprehensive about singing the song. Although well-intentioned, it would behoove the music therapy program to have offered a course addressing the socio-political-historical contexts of songs. I understand that naivety, shortsightedness, and a genuine affinity to the selected tune played a part in their choosing, but deeper meaning is needed. Context is necessary; knowing background knowledge as to who the intended audience is for, whom the song was written for, and understating the overall meaning is valuable information. This is reminiscent of the neutrality of being white, not having to be cognizant of power and privilege, only moving in invisibility by pretending it just does not exist. Unfortunately, the song choice did not explore the richness of what I perceived the program had to offer. Consequently, this example negatively impacted my vocal performance. This overcompensation was a response to the negative classification associated with my Blackness and having to negotiate my dueling and dualling selves to offset the pressures of being viewed as *one of those*.

**Erasure**

With the guidance of CRT, I am reminded to share my story and question how racial trauma impacted my experience at GCSU. My existence and presence as a Black woman navigating as a scholar in music therapy invokes a dual sense of self, as Dubois coined *double consciousness,* where I found myself having to appease others by my mere presence by making the dominant structures comfortable and using language that was palatable. The climate that

exists is one that is dehumanizing and disregarding, I must pacify feelings while rejecting my own. All to curry favor in the social structural narratives. Am I mad?! One can consider the racial layers of cultural appropriation, covert, and overt racial attacks, micro and macroaggressions, assimilation, projection, gaslighting, and white privilege. Often, when I am among my peers, whether at GCSU or off campus, it is as if I do not exist. On the occasions that I do engage in discussions, it is almost as if I must initiate conversations with white people to appear sweet and kind-natured. If I do not initiate, seldom does anyone come around; they seem to be uninterested in who I am. I am aware of my rendered status of invisibility, where there is a structural exclusion or casual disgust that denies the legitimacy that I do not register on their Richter scale. Nevertheless, I take it upon myself to interject or ingratiate myself in their circle, whose world is full of wonder and imagination. It is almost as if my existence has no meaning or significance.

Black erasure exists in this world! Within the walls of GCSU, there was a burning desire to see a representation of self. I yearn to have representation, not just in view of an authentic, caring, and holistic depiction of someone because a handful of peers and instructors exhibited those traits, but a representation of someone who shared the same phenotype and energy. Representation matters, and it is mighty to have it in the educational arena as one can indirectly or directly advocate for or serve as an empowering activist on my behalf.

During my matriculation at GCSU, there was an absence of diverse music therapy educators versus the student population served. According to the AMTA's 2021 Workforce Analysis Survey, of the volunteered respondents, 88.34% of music therapists were white, 2.39% were black, and 0.48% were multiracial. Statistically, the ethnic groupings of Latinx and Asians were qualified and quantified; however, they do not reflect the racial ternary component. There

are many Latinx and Asians who identify as white/black/dark-Latinx and/or black/dark/white-Asian, which to me are ethnic groupings. For this thesis, my intent is not to be exclusionary, but felt it necessary to drive home the point that this construction of race is, in my opinion, ternary, representing black, white, and multiracial or multiethnic. These numbers reflect the disproportion between racial differences within the profession and the general population, proving the need for diversity and inclusion within the program.

At the time of full-time enrollment, the program underwent significant changes, from the resignation of a department chair to other department transitions and inadequate staffing. Understandably, during this transitional change, the priority of diversity was not at the forefront; however, the need for Black representation was still ever present. There was a requirement to have a Black music therapist educator to speak on their experiences and understand their navigation within the profession. I imagine this Black representation to be an affirming feeling of seeing a person like myself and one in a position of power and influence (leadership). What representation meant and still means for me is an elimination of feeling othered and a restored feeling that my worth is valued and validated. Black representation at GCSU would have meant experiencing a sense of familiarity, belonging, advocacy, and solidarity that my needs are recognized, and that I am not alone. Admittedly, GCSU would benefit from having a more diverse staff, in particular Black representation, educators who can serve as a mentor, whereby establishing when in the clinical arena, the ethical treatment of the dyadic pairings between instructor/scholar and scholar/client are prioritized, which will lead to more culturally responsive, empathetic, and skilled music therapists. Moreover, actions can be taken with the intention to be accountable and new possibilities for culturally responsive practices to be explored.

My existence and presence as a Black woman navigating this program must be of a disarming nature to make the dominant culture feel comfortable and use palatable language - to ingratiate them - with the social structural narrative's world. The climate that exists is one that is dehumanizing and disregarding; I often find myself drained and exhausted as I must pacify others' feelings while rejecting my own. I have internalized the teachings of the matriarchs in my family, who taught me to *work twice as hard* and adhere to the phenomenon of the Strong Black Woman. I believed that if I were to fall short, the same leniency would not be afforded to me as my classmates. I welcomed all the challenges of working full-time, including a career that was bustling overnight and on the weekend. After a while, it became clear that my absence from specific events and pre-practicum work was being discussed. The gripe was the unfairness of certain privileges being afforded to me, such as joining certain groups, class times, and events on a video conferencing platform. My submissions for assignments were mostly on time, and so was my attendance for the required bachelor classes, all carried out to protect myself. The pressures to make this effort, compounded with challenging circumstances (that I consciously choose not to disclose), were exhausting. So much energy was expended to offset this kind of treatment. None of these factors mattered; the only requirement was that my body be there. Furthermore, I let them begrudgingly, but my presence for events, classes, and groups was there. I felt stifled. I was screaming from the pits of my stomach. How dare I get asked, what do you do for self-care? What did that mean for me? What did that look like? At one point, it meant engaging in self-maintenance routines that I was accustomed to and looked like doing weight training, cycling, recreational reading, getting pedicures, and watching movies. This instance showed how whiteness can be neutralized in the sense that it ignores unique challenges that scholars such as myself face and the added effort I put into succeeding.

Reconciliation? A possible theme to the notion of "*neoliberalism*" where Black people are expected to make White people feel at ease and accepted. I often encounter power imbalances through White intrusion, where boundaries are obscured, and the presumption of access to me is threatening. In one instance, a peer interjected into my conversation with a fellow Black scholar. It was jarring, as they were eavesdropping and materialized out of nowhere. The need to insert themselves and their opinions runs deep, disrupting our casual conversation where we were speaking freely. This incident is one of many that speaks to the stereotypical behavior that is rooted in memory and history. It is an affront to Blackness that they felt the need to assert their physical body and opinions into the discourse, which caused a disturbance. From a historical perspective, their behavior was demeaning and arrogant, and I felt burdened to have to explain and educate others about the differences and my discomfort. This retraumatized me.

To combat unwanted and inadequate feelings, the music therapy program can change the narrative by creating an inclusive and equitable learning atmosphere. Changing the narrative means challenging the treatment of Black scholars by calling out the discriminatory acts that are perpetuated in the classroom. Another way would be to challenge the very systems that are in place, which oppress the voiceless. Instructors can reflect on their own philosophy and practices to see how scholars are affected and examine the changes that are needed for success and inclusion. This would illustrate adopting a CRT-anti-oppressive-social justice approach for SMTs and instructors to mitigate the risks of continuing oppressive practices.

**I Belong Here!**

The theme I Belong Here invoke feelings of being in the right place and of being accepted and valued by those around me. However, there were moments when my self-doubt came into play when I faced a barrier to the lack of multiculturalism at school. Moving from

Brooklyn, New York (NY), residing now in the conservative, deep south of Georgia, commuting to Milledgeville was a cultural shift. Southern pride was prominent, and so were customs that were unfamiliar to me in NY. With the transitions of moving from a melting pot of varied ethnicities to the racial binary of the South, with its vast history rooted in slavery and oppression, I am constantly reminded that I am an outsider to *their* world. I second guess my abilities to succeed, continuously questioning my legitimacy in the music therapy program. Must I prove to my peers that I am not a diversity acceptance? And if so, how do I? Better question, why should I? How does your position, one of power, relate on a grander scale? How might we change the collective attitudes, behaviors, and perspectives?

One thing is for sure: I am now confident in my abilities and skills as an SMT, knowing that my unique perspective can enrich the field. I appreciate the diversity and riches of music and am grateful that I was exposed to the different cultural experiences from NY. Despite the challenges of stereotypes and prejudices that permeate the South, I am appreciative of the beauty and charm the South has to offer. I understand my worth! My values! I deserve to stand among the *others* who think I do not deserve to be here. Part of my purpose is to explain how my Blackness is not a perception or projection of how the dominant narratives view me. I have a responsibility to shift the narrative. *I Belong Here* because I have a purpose that will bring positive differences to a profession that will eventually see me and other Black scholars.

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# Chapter 5
## Discussion and Conclusion

It is unfortunate that some music therapy ideologies stem from shady ideals that are rooted in racial beliefs, unconscious biases, and stereotypes. These ideologies led to adverse outcomes and contributed to the racial trauma I experienced daily. My findings added to the limited research on my individualized racially educational experience as a Black scholar of music therapy. Accounts of discriminatory acts, microaggressions, and both covert and overt racism had a profound impact on my mental health and well-being. The manifestations of my unique experiences resulted in having internalizing problems of low self-esteem, high blood pressure, overeating, frequent headaches, anxiety, and sleep disturbances (Cenat, 2023). The conflicts at GCSU have inspired me to explore my autoethnography, where I found it noteworthy to acknowledge the issues of systemic racism in music therapy programs and how they led to adverse outcomes and racial trauma. Guided by research questions:

1. How have the impacts of racial trauma influenced my experiences at GCSU?
2. What were the consequences of these racialized experiences?

This chapter will discuss the four themes that emerged from this study, which were Silenced and Invisible, Anti-Blackness, Erasure, and I Belong Here!

James Baldwin, the great American writer and critic, eloquently wrote about the "innocence of America," which is the idealized belief of America. This belief makes America vulnerable to the harsh realities of its past and present. Baldwin's works are a powerful critique of the fabric of America and its systemic racism (Liu, 2017). Influenced by his writings, relevancy remains and helps me to understand the current socio-political climate of American society. Until this point, throughout my narrative, I have highlighted my worldview where most

issues dealt with White supremacy in the educational arena and showed how my insights were filtered through [counter]-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). Through the sharing of my personal accounts, awareness was raised. In this autoethnography, I will add to the academic scholarship in music therapy by centering my voice on racial trauma and positioning myself as the expert on issues related to racial trauma in the educational arena. The following section will reveal how I have navigated my experiences with peers who have acted on these ideas and values, which are institutionalized by dominant narratives. In this chapter, I will draw on insights and the relevant literature to provide context and depth to my results. Additionally, I will recommend how my findings support a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework for pedagogical teaching and practices. Lastly, these findings will help inform and guide intentional pedagogical training for SMTs to be ethical and effective in training and practice.

**Silenced and Invisible**

With regard to my autoethnography's qualitative findings, the conceptual framework of CRT-social justice-multiculturalism is a suitable anchor to ground this thesis. Bridging this theoretical frame, the cumulative impacts of racism resulted in racial trauma and have manifested in systems of oppression, racial microaggressions, White supremacy, anti-Blackness, discriminatory acts, and systemic racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Comas-Diaz, 2016; Nadal et al., 2019). Confirming systems of oppression within this framework, I shared descriptive experiences within the context of my race as they related to feeling Silenced and Invisible. I described instances how my classmates uttered comments like "*Affirmative action is no longer necessary due to fairness in schools*," "*I'm sure there was something you did to allow that to happen,"* and *"It is what it is; there is improvement*; w*ell, those things happen because it does*." These comments reflect a lack of understanding and sensitivity and contribute to feelings

of being overlooked, undermined, ignored, and invisible (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Further, within this theme, other trauma-invoking statements were displayed by my classmate's indifference and inability to empathize with the experiences of myself and Black scholars. Some examples were questioning a peer's academic ability, which perpetuated stereotypes and undermined confidence; calling on the "token Black scholar" to provide the perspective of their lived experience was burdensome and made me feel singled out. Unsolicited critiques of the manner in which a scholar spoke were interpreted as dismissive or trivializing and reflected a lack of appreciation for linguistic diversity. Finally, denying racial biases through attempts to connect gender oppression to racial oppression was an attempt to minimize my Black experience. These microaggressive acts have a significant impact where the above examples enabled internalized feelings of oppression, invalidation, silencing, and established unwarranted physiological distress (Kinouani, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020; Ramos-Watts, 2023).

The findings in this theme support the idea that there is a lack of awareness and concern among classmates, as demonstrated by their arrogant, crude, and brash responses (Kinouani, 2020). The treatments displayed in this theme were indicative of their white supremacist ideology, unequal power dynamics as it relates to my Blackness, and inequitable power imbalances, which protected "the status quo and their psychic equilibrium" (Kinouani, 2020, p. 149). My classmate's suppositions and behaviors need to be corrected through an interrogation of "biases, assumptions, and areas of privileges" so that they can become more aware of their insensitivities and lower their "psychological defences" (Kinouani, 2020, p. 158; Liu, 2017; Singh et al., 2010, p. 769).

The censorship of my voice and my Blackness were used as a tool to weaponize my experiences. Anchoring a CRT framework, I can examine the patterns of silencing and

invisibility and see how enmeshed race and racism are and that the vehicle of White supremacy continues to negate acknowledgment that racism is inherent in academic spaces (Kinouani, 2020; Liu, 2017). Also, by examining each example and applying a social justice-multicultural framework, there is an understanding that learning about "racial trauma, microaggressions, and their influences on mental health" is essential for SMTs pedagogical knowledge and training (Nadal et al., 2019, p. 13; Quiros et al., 2020). Consequently, utilizing a multicultural-social justice lens will help to emphasize that there is a need for Black and marginalized scholars to examine, transform, and integrate the "construction of Whiteness" for success to manifest (Kinouani, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020, p. 160). I highlight the importance of using a critical, relentless interrogation of Whiteness, which would require the dominant social structures to understand how its language is constructed, how racism is minimized, and how deliberate acts of "white denial" impede any efforts for inclusivity (Kinouani, 2020, p. 158; Liu, 2017; Quiros et al., 2020).

**Anti-Blackness**

The second theme of Anti-Blackness is characterized by several experiences that are indicative of a well-crafted mechanism that perpetually negates the value of Blackness, which is White supremacy (Liu, 2017). In my narrative, I provided situations that failed to acknowledge the inclusion of who I am and were indicative of behaviors and stereotypes. All examples were, in some shape or fashion, a manifestation of how my racial trauma was catalyzed. Whether it be through vicarious experiences of police brutality and from witnessing comments about a fellow classmate's hair, these are forms of anti-Blackness that disproportionately affect me and other Black scholars. Anti-Blackness, as Liu (2017) asserts, is gatekept by the constructs of Whiteness and contends that the expectation of White supremacy is to "surveil, police, and intervene to

correct behaviors of people of color" (p. 351). With this knowledge, understanding the racial overtones, negotiations of identity, and "recognizing the centrality of oppression and racial trauma in the functioning society" is needed for a culturally-centered music therapy approach (Kinouani, 2020, p.148; Quiros et al., 2020).

Direct experiences, such as the instance of racial profiling by campus security about the legitimacy of my presence on campus, were another form of systemic racism that targeted me. Unfortunate encounters such as this, as well as the lack of representation of role models or faculty, have resulted in the diminishing of my morale and lack of confidence (Kinouani, 2020). Joseph et al., 2023 supported the notion that "Black representation has positive implications for the mentorship" of Black scholars and "their sense of belonging" (p. 653).

More microaggressive experiences from classmates at GCSU were evident through misidentifying and singling me and other Black scholars to cover uncomfortable topics related to discrimination and racism. These experiences were reflective of anti-Blackness. A CRT-social justice-multicultural framework can be used to analyze the ways in which I use my voice to call out systemic racism and experiences in higher learning environments (Quiros et al., 2020).

**Erasure**

In the theme of Erasure, I described a situation where representation allowed me to see myself reflected in an academic space. Representation is powerful because it is a tool for empowerment and advocacy, which helps counteract misconceptions and stereotypes (Joseph et al., 2023). My desire to see and have representation is a fitting example of erasure because it illuminates my feelings of being overlooked, excluded, and ignored, as evidenced by Ogunyemi et al.'s (2020) study. Ever-present systemic issues contributed to my experience that is deeply rooted in ideologies that continue to threaten my emotional and psychological well-being

(Pieterse et al., 2011). Additionally, I described a situation where I felt like I had to conform to the expectations of my peers to be accepted. Regarding the study conducted by Baker and Moore (2015), it is interesting to note that 19 racial and ethnic doctoral students in counselor education felt stereotyped by their peers and faculty members with pressures to conform and be equal in white spaces, which they called "playing the game." The act of "playing the game" was a form of erasure for me because it had a profound impact on me, which led to feeling invisible and excluded, and where my very presence was not valued. I also noted the use of palatable language, which is a phenomenon known as code-switching when in the spaces that I was least comfortable with (Baker & Moore, 2015). Code-switching is an act of changing one's voice to sound like the dominant group, which can be both empowering and disempowering (Baker & Moore, 2015). This type of code-switching was a disempowering experience for me as I had to suppress aspects of my identity to navigate the school setting.

In my last example, I shared the experience of the inability of white classmates and professors to recognize the academic work I had put in and requiring me to show up despite the many compounding factors there were. This was a form of erasure that nullified my psychological thoughts, realities, and feelings (Quiros et al., 2020, p. 161). The invalidation of feelings of defeat and strangled were metaphoric to my "experiential reality" (Quiros et al., 2020, p. 161). Espousing a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework allows me to analyze the socio-political and racialized landscape that is endemic within the educational system (Quiros et al., 2020). It also allows me to position myself and understand how social structures reinforce their hierarchy of power to erase me. Yet gain insight into ways of positioning myself to cultivate "cultural humility and cultural competence" (Nadal et al., 2019, p. 13). There is also relevance for this frame because the examples highlight how systemic racism can create barriers to equal

opportunity and highlight the importance of creating inclusive environments that value diversity and promote equity in the academic environment (Baker & Moore, 2015).

**I Belong Here!**

In the final theme of I Belong Here!, I shared my journey of personal awakening, where I took steps to overcome the challenges I faced. When moving to the conservative and homogenous state of Georgia, I felt sidelined and excluded from a system, albeit university and peers that tried to erase my visibility. The rich data I shared showed the immense amount of prejudice and disregard I faced. These obstacles were just that – obstacles! They did not define who I am, nor did they fit into MY NARRATIVE. Even though my narrative reflects how white supremacist ideology from members in the educational arena still functions and is deeply advantaged by the very system that subjugates Black scholars, I wish to reclaim agency! I have the power to shape and color my own narrative! Even though I was sometimes perceived as a Strong Black Woman or Angry Black Woman, my story empowers and provides a clear view of how my racialized experiences were shaped within the educational arena. I define my own terms!

Throughout my journey, I was fortunate to have the support of family members, friends, mentors, and a therapist who helped me navigate through these challenges. Their encouragement and guidance were invaluable in helping me stay the course. To regain a sense of belonging, I realized the deeper connection in my awakening, that my story is not solely about my experiences but about the other Black voices who have been silenced. My hope is for others to embrace their own identities and stand up against exclusion, erasure, and silencing. This connection and understanding enabled me to incorporate multiculturalism and social justice efforts into my music therapy work. For example, I shared a presentation on my cultural heritage

and gave insight into the historical, sociopolitical, and healthcare systems of Trinidad and Tobago as they relate to the music therapy profession. In my presentation, I explained how these systems are affected by the practice of music therapy, through preserving and promoting cultural identity and heritage (using the steelpan in therapy), through raising awareness and challenging stigma and violence against women, as well as by offering a holistic approach to the health care by complementing conventional treatment. In this process, I aimed to show the diversity of human experience and perspective, enrich my peer's knowledge, and challenge stereotypes and prejudices. I also connected my identity to the identity of my culture and heritage by including songs of my culture to mock case scenarios in class, as well as incorporating rhythmic, tonal, and modal elements in the practicum sphere. For example, I included these elements in my Hello and Goodbye songs to begin and close out sessions. The incorporation of these elements was quite memorable for clients, where they sang and danced, stimulating motor and cognitive functions. Clients requested that the songs be included because they *liked* them and made them *feel happy*, facilitating emotional expression. The songs also promoted and exposed clients to my cultural identity. I participated in various initiatives aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion and working towards creating a more equitable atmosphere. My realization helped me celebrate my identity and heritage, and it became a source of resilience, inspiration, and perseverance for me.

GCSU's music therapy program is dominated by whiteness, and its teachings and practices reflect this. I have divulged vulnerable moments where I confronted and challenged instances of feeling silenced, invisible, and erased. I have theorized these experiences and come to the realization that I Belong Here! The themes all relate to one another, showing the common thread of racial trauma and how its symptoms have manifested and impacted me. All themes

align with a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework. This could make them culturally relevant to the pedagogical teachings and practices of GCSU's music therapy program.

**Future Implications and Recommendations**

Proving my legitimacy in the music therapy program was a struggle; however, I know that I was accepted based on my qualifications and merit, which brings a unique perspective and experience that can contribute to the richness of the program. The insights into my experiences may inform future CRT-social justice-multicultural frameworks and add relevant scholarship to pedagogical training and teaching. This autoethnography provides insight into my experiences as a Black woman, which establishes a lens to add to academic scholarship and college pedagogy about my experiences of racial trauma.

The first implication of this autoethnography emphasizes the need for more Black scholars to share their experiences of oppression, discriminatory acts, and racism within the music therapy program and the profession. Through the intentional acts of inclusion, Black voices are prioritized in academic scholarship, which turns to narratives that "represent resistance" to systemic racialized practices and reinforces the need for a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework (Quiros et al., 2020, p. 165). By including more voices of those who are marginalized, programs can celebrate their "cultural ways of knowing," validate experiences to empower change, establish normalcy, and regain worthiness to decenter power, privilege, and oppression (Powell et al., 2021, p. 248). I suggest that a checks and balances system be implemented where faculty can foster an environment that does monthly check-ins to ensure Black voices are being considered. One way would be to require that Black scholars have the opportunity to access individual and group counseling offered through the university by culturally-responsive therapists. This system ensures that feedback, critiques, and opinions are

made to help guide the development of music therapy programs. This system of accountability establishes rapport between professors and scholars and encourages an inclusive academic atmosphere.

In my second implication, instructing student music therapists through a CRT-social justice-multiculturalism framework would be beneficial to the development of their musical cultural competence. This process will help to develop their clinical skills through the involvement of "understanding the meaning and uses of music within a specific culture" and being thoughtful of the ways in which music suits the needs of an individual and their "belief of their cultural community (Young, 2016, p. 128). Another way is to garner an understanding of their personal and musical cultural biases that the therapist brings to the music therapy context" (Hadley& Norris, 2016). This process helps SMTs to respect and recognize the variety of cultural variables in the learning and therapeutic environment. It promotes self-awareness once self-reflection is achieved (Hadley& Norris, 2016), promotes cultural sensitivity, and ensures a commitment to social justice where SMTs can address issues of power, privilege, and oppression in the teaching and training arena (Peters et al., 2022). It is an ongoing process that requires continual commitment and vigilance.

By incorporating these frameworks into the curriculum and practicum, scholars can develop a deeper understanding of racialized experiences. To establish such a curriculum, competency and ethical guidelines should first be established and included in the AMTA Code of Ethics. These guidelines are designed to place safeguards on instructors and ensure that the delivery of their teaching is culturally sensitive, respectful, and inclusive. Careful consideration of the infliction of harm or additional trauma onto SMTs would have to be achieved to establish fidelity. Also, it helps establish benchmarks that are achievable and promote the development of

effective teaching practices. After the establishment of ethical and competency guidelines for teaching CRT-social justice-multiculturalism, integration of these frameworks into music therapy programs should be considered to foster fairness and healing.

For the third implication, I propose applying a non-Eurocentric frame to promote inclusivity, a lens that honors the experiences of scholars, teachers, and clients who are sitting on the fringes of society. This type of perspective will embrace the multiplicities of individuals and capture the intersections of a variety of cultures. It would also acknowledge that culture is ever-present, from the way humanity interacts with one another to the functions of music. Therefore, it would be beneficial for music therapy programs to explore music and therapeutic interventions that reflect these nuances of culture and religion. For instance, understanding the specific dynamics of parent/child relationships in Asian communities and the dynamics of gender roles as they relate to certain religious groups, such as Hasidic Jews or Muslim men, who may express concerns about modesty, especially from women clinicians.

One way to achieve inclusivity within multiple CRT-multicultural-social justice type courses in music therapy programs is for SMTs to read about an individual's cultural and religious background, keeping in mind that beliefs are not all-encompassing and may vary based on the individual. Scholars would then use Hanson-Abromeit's (2015) Therapeutic Functions of Music (TFM) strategy to help create interventions that are safe and inclusive. By creating or using preexisting case studies, SMTs will think critically about their clients' clinical needs and be intentional with how therapeutic outcomes are applied. SMTs should consider treatment goals and objectives, apply and interpret a rationale for musical elements and theoretical frameworks, and lastly, present a musical selection that adheres to the intentional planning of TFM.

As a final implication, it would be imperative to place mandates for music therapy programs to instruct on issues related to racialized and ethnic issues. One way to implement this mandate is to broach open-ended questions about racial trauma and other racialized traumatic experiences. For example, in classroom settings, instructors can investigate scholars' perspectives through questions like, what makes us human, and what is the common goal? How are policies, theoretical frameworks, and universities couched in language? How can music be used as a tool for processing, healing, and expressing racial trauma? When in the clinical arena, how can clients best be supported after issues of race and racism arise? When in school or in practicum, how do you cope with the vicarious and direct racial traumatic experiences? How can your identity or the clients' identity be valued and included in the clinical sphere? How do we move away from language and systems that maintain the status quo? But before we engage in such questioning, we must repeatedly ask ourselves, "How does internalized whiteness show up in me in [music therapy]?" (Singh, 2020, p. 1118).

Educating and training can demonstrate how topics of anti-oppressive frameworks are integrated by decentering antiquated and Eurocentric ideologies and practices (French et al., 2020; Singh, 2020). One solution French et al. (2020) suggested was to assign reading on the history of Black communities for scholars to develop "an in-depth knowledge of their sociopolitical and historical contexts" (p. 33). Another suggestion is to require scholars to "read interdisciplinary scholarship on critical race theory," womanist theory, and other anti-oppressive theories and frameworks and then apply it to case scenarios, which will then translate into the practicum experience (French et al., 2020, p. 34; Norris, 2021; Singh, 2020). Other ways are to conduct and facilitate difficult conversations and then provide the necessary resources that will aid in "critical awareness of oppress[ive]" systems and help to become socially conscious

(French et al., 2020, p. 20; Quiros et al., 2020). Group supervision experiences could be useful for examining "social power differentials" in the classroom (Norris, 2021; Norris, 2020; Quiros et al., 2020, p. 162, 164). This will require professors and scholars to do the crucial work of reflexive practice by leaning into their own discomfort and truly dissect "their own positionality" in society and the impact it has on Black scholars. Overall, a multifaceted approach is necessary to address issues related to racial trauma and broaching uncomfortable discussions.

**Recommendations**

Even though my autoethnography highlights my reflections and critical inner workings, for future research, I recommend that future researchers place emphasis on Black voices from scholars enrolled in the undergraduate, graduate, and master's equivalency programs. Their cultural identities can be examined through a lens that augments their own voices and so can be used to inform and empower. In other words, the process of understanding and analyzing scholars' cultural identities and unique aspects of culture can be used to educate others and encourage others to highlight their own cultures. By examining their voices, the audience will be able to get an understanding of the varied nuances of their identities. Secondly, a CRT-social justice-multicultural framework is important because it requires scholars to dismantle dominant narratives, recognize the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts of society, foster understanding of racialized experiences, and promote an appreciation of cultural differences (Quiros et al., 2020). However, further research and attention are needed to critique the social structures – white supremacist ideology via philosophy, practice, theory, and instruction – to ensure that music therapy scholarship and pedagogy are anti-oppressive and inclusive. Lastly, there is still a need to have invisible barriers removed from the academic scholarship of music therapy publication and employ more inclusive and equitable work.

## Limitations

The internal and external facilitators are beneficial to my growth and progress. Overall, I am motivated to contribute to a changing world and for readers to engage in critical discourse about my lived experience. Curiosity is what drives me as well, witnessing the unfurling process of my introspective views and seeing how new perspectives may shape my lens. As for external facilitators, I am eager to receive guidance and feedback from the committee. I am confident that comments and suggestions are all going to enhance my writing.

The initial internal challenges that I am fraught with while engaging in this autoethnography are vulnerability – the unveiling of a mask - and committing to transparency. These two hindrances stem from my lack of confidence and courage to have my inner workings read by the committee and potentially the masses. Another internal hindrance is self-denying, which comes in the form of losing my voice or losing my narrative. An external hindrance is the quality in which the data is received by my readers. Since I am relying heavily on memory and translation of memory, the subjective nature of my analysis and interpretation will be biased.

## Reflections

Growing up with an involved mother who was very influential, I reflect on how my clinical work is done. Being a retired psychiatric nurse and therapist, my mother incorporated her spirituality, faith, multicultural, and Africentric perspective into her practice, where she opened my sensibilities about being a Black woman and traversing this world in a predominantly white world. She has helped to shape my understanding of how I move throughout time and space. By not speaking or inserting any of her religious doctrines or asking pointed questions about her patients' religious practices, she kept a level of openness to being with people. My mother understood the instrument of her emergence, which she used to her advantage for her expressed

work. Her philosophical work is based on her African heritage, where she is unapologetically Black. She resided in Brooklyn, NY, via the sister islands of Trinidad and Tobago, where she was born. My experience at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) in the Southern hemisphere of America, known as the *"Bible Belt,"* was disproportionately unfair. However, when the structures of inequality were made visible, they afforded me an incredible toolkit to make sense of it. I realized that my sense of grounding and worldview took my experience of living in a predominantly Black universe and made it normative, where a sense of identity was cultivated. My transition and awakening were very empowering but also devastating because I noticed that this is a well-organized system that functions and exists based on the manipulation of facts.

Looking forward to the future, I believe that inclusion and diversity in the learning environment are pivotal to the academic success of many scholars. In music therapy programs, it is essential that scholars gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject, where their strengths and perspectives are challenged yet respected by the diverse opinions of the class. The teaching-learning environment will be emboldened through the inclusive and diverse nature of the culturally nuanced class where a think tank of critical and creative discourse is engaged. As the facilitator/professor guides, they are tasked with encouraging this type of discourse that can expose scholars to multiple perspectives, which calls for problem-solving and teamwork. It is my hope that everyone will find their voice and continue to promote an atmosphere conducive to cultural competence. I also hope that everyone embraces a person-centered approach to reaching the person where they are, learning that the tapestry of therapy between client and client-therapist is embedded in its very culture. Embracing a multicultural perspective will support cultural humility to differences in the teaching and learning environment, which will create a space that cultivates an individual's abilities, skillset, and values that foster appreciation and

recognition of individual differences by realizing the sociopolitical structures render Blackness visible and venerate Blackness to humanity.

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