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(Re)humanizing: A Culturally Informed Approach to Coping with the Manifestation of Super Woman Schema in Black Women with Trauma Exposure

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(Re)humanizing: A Culturally Informed Approach to Coping with the Manifestation of Super

Woman Schema in Black Women with Trauma Exposure

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

May 5, 2020

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Dance/Movement Therapy

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Abstract

Using the Community Engagement option, this Capstone Thesis was used to create a method to explore a culturally informed approach to coping with the manifestation of Super Woman Schema in Black Women with trauma exposure. In this thesis the researcher discusses Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) in as it relates to the formation of maladaptive techniques such as Super Woman Schema. Additionally, this Capstone Thesis provides a historical context on the cultural significance of Rhythm and Blues music and Dance/Movement Therapy and ties it to the importance of healing for the community at-large. This researcher utilized self as instrument to explore their own relationship with the symptoms of Super Woman Schema, while utilizing the culturally significant forms of improvisational dance and Rhythm and Blues (RnB) music to assist with managing the symptoms of said relationship. The objective was to create an intentional space, “a sensual sanctuary” to encourage the awareness and expression of emotions for the Black Woman whom has, due to their post-slavery identity, experienced complex trauma. The results highlight the importance of reconnecting, mourning the loss of, and celebrating the ancestry of the African Diaspora. As a result, the title of this thesis respectively highlights the method’s focus on utilizing the community, expressing vulnerability, and actively exploring a relationship with one’s emotions as a strength as a rehumanizing experience.

Keywords: Trauma, Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome, Super Woman Schema, Rhythm and Blues, Dance/Movement Therapy

(Re)humanizing: A Culturally Informed Approach to Coping with the Manifestation of Super Woman Schema in Black Women with Trauma Exposure

Introduction

*“You’ve mastered survival mode. Now, it’s time to live.”
-Unknown*

The concept of trauma has shifted within the last 30 years. There is uncertainty whether the concept of trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a cultural phenomenon or one with rich biological and epistemological basis (Krupnik, 2019). The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study defined trauma as experiences that negatively impacted a person and correlated said trauma to adulthood health discrepancies (Edwards, 2003). Previously, trauma was exclusively defined and considered to be in less frequent events such as natural disasters and death. As a result of the ACEs study, we are now considering bullying, microaggressions, and car accidents to name a few, as pivotal incidences in a person’s life. These instances can trigger a polyvagal response within a person and begin the onset of symptoms collectively categorized in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness categorized by emotional distress, nightmares, exaggerated blame of self, difficulty experiencing positive affect, irritability, aggression, difficulty concentrating and sleeping for over a 30-day period (Diagnostic and statistical manual, mental disorders, 2008). For members of the African Diaspora, the traumatic experiences of enslavement in the United States have brought about what Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005) defines as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). PTSS is “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). Additionally, Dr. DeGruy states that PTSS is “...a condition that exist as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of

chattel slavery” (p. 113). With this knowledge of multigenerational trauma and how it manifests in the African American community, present research has narrowed in on the experience of trauma for the African American woman.

African American women are at-risk at experiencing compounding traumatic events in their lifetime (Stevens-Watkins, Sharma, Knighton, Oser & Leukefeld, 2014) and ultimately experiencing ongoing PTSD symptoms. African American women experience trauma at a rate unduly to their Caucasian counterparts (Hampton, Oliver & Magarian, 2003) and yet are increasingly represented in doctoral and graduate degree programs (Patterson-Stephens, Lane & Vital, 2017). On the surface, one may assume that this population is prospering without realizing the numerous coping skills and strategies one must utilize to gain more access to predominantly white spaces. Difficulties including financing their education, networking, gaining recognition in their field of study, navigating through racially micro-aggressive behavior, and overcoming negative stereotypes of their culture; plus being a pillar of emotional strength for their families whilst attaining higher education (Baumgartner & Johnson-Bailey, 2010; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Patton, 2009). Although there are numerous maladaptive coping strategies utilized by African Americans, this researcher will focus specifically on one strategy and coping skill utilized by African American women called Super Woman Schema (SWS).

Super Woman Schema is an ideology that has been directly influencing African American women’s health and how they cope or “weather” their stress and/ or stressors (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). SWS is categorized by an obligation to manifest strength, suppress emotions, resist vulnerability, obligation to help others, and determination to succeed despite limited resources (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). Suppressing emotions is a common and almost normalized custom of the African American experience. For African Americans, accepting a mental health

diagnosis and seeking treatment comes with stigma and being labeled as “crazy” amongst social circles (Williams, 2011). Suppressing emotions can also be considered as a root cause of depression, anxiety, suicide, aggression, and other medical issues. Emotional suppression is the tendency to inhibit the expression of emotions (Chapman, Fiscella, Kawachi, Duberstein & Muennig, 2013). A considerable amount of research has been done on trauma, how trauma effects the brain, and the quality of life of an individual. However, there is an understudied area and lack of creation of culturally informed interventions for the Black Woman who is actively coping with and grieving the maladaptive technique of SWS.

As a member of the African American community, a woman, a mother, a trauma survivor, mental health clinician, researcher, and an advocate for all of these identities, I will be focusing on a method that will enrich the coping of trauma exposure in African American women. Going forward, I will transition from using the language of “African-American”, a term given to define my culture from those who have oppressed us, to a term of solidarity used by all members of the African Diaspora, “Black”.

Using the Community Engagement option, this method explores a culturally informed approach to coping with the manifestation of Super Woman Schema in Black Women with trauma exposure. Whereas this researcher will utilize self as instrument to explore their own relationship with the symptoms of Super Woman Schema while utilizing the culturally significant forms of improvisational dance and Rhythm and Blues (RnB) music to assist with managing the symptoms of said relationship. This method is created for the African American community to bring forth methods of healing that will assist in coping with the symptoms of Super Woman Schema and will include improvisational dance, journaling, and art making experiences. The objective is to encourage the awareness and expression of emotions for the

Black Woman whom has, due to their post-slavery identity, experienced complex trauma. Living life numbly and fearing the impact of expressing your emotions, needs, and desires is a dehumanizing experience and maladaptive existence. As a result, the title of this thesis respectively highlights the method to focus on rehumanizing. This researcher holds the belief that acknowledging your emotions, exploring them through culturally relevant avenues, and having the community to hold space for them is indeed a matter of life or death and a moral obligation for those impacted by a post-slavery legacy beyond survivance (Murrock, PhD, RN & Gary, EdD, RN, FAAN, 2008).

Literature Review

In order to have to a grander understanding of a culture, you must understand their traditions. As stated by John Henrik Clarke, an African American historian, professor, and a pioneer in the creation of Pan-African and Africana studies, “The best way to define African American identity is by placing them in the context of African history” (Toure, 2009). Traditionally, music and dance expression has been utilized throughout the continent of Africa as a source of survival, inspiration, hope, and release; a similar theme that aligns with the Western model of psychology and the betterment of mental health (Robinson, 2015). These traditions of mental health and expression have been brought over from Africa and reshaped to meet the specific challenges faced from the experience of enslavement in the United States of America (Robinson, 2015). As a result, the purpose of this literature review is to explore the cultural significance and necessity of the modalities used within the context of developing a culturally informed method of coping with the manifestation of Super Woman Schema (SWS) for the Black Woman with trauma exposure.

The Cultural Significance of Rhythm-and-Blues Music

The enslaved African innately coped with their trauma by making attempts to stay grounded in their culture through the utilization of song. The use of song incorporated altering the melodies and lyrics to evoke a range of feelings from sadness or sorrow to happy or carefree (Caldwell, 2003). The enslaved African was denied the use of their oppressor's language by limiting access to formal education. Overtime they began to create a language, "Pidgin", to communicate with their oppressors and amongst themselves (Smitherman, 1996). Consequently, enslaved Africans were often unable to express themselves in a way that adequately represents the biological, psychological, and emotional suffering they were experiencing. Resourcefully, they were led to non-verbal forms of communication that were spontaneous and easily accessible, bodies and voices (Salaam, 1995).

Later, even when musical instruments were employed, that spontaneous form of communication used as a means to express pain, grief, and sorrow became a tool of passive resistance to be named Blues music (Steinfeld, 2016). Categorized by its use of raw emotion, moaning, stomping, and utilization of major, minor, and flat keys; Blues music represented the opposing voice that refused to be silenced by oppression and segregation while sliding between musical keys to convey the irony of human existence (Steinfeld, 2016). The lyrics of women's Blues expressed women's independence, often through role reversals with men; often addressing abuse and violence against women. By speaking up they fought against conventions and challenged a social order that was not only dominated by whites but also patriarchal ideals (Steinfeld, 2016). The band, who typically kept the rhythm for the lead singer, served as a metronome for the singer. The performer was able to utilize their voice against the repetition of the music to create a tension that evoked emotion. A theory as to why Blues music can be played with such simple instruments is that it represents the part of the oppressed that the oppressor

could not touch, and therefore it is a deep expression of human nature. African American's identity was shaped in an environment whose language, society, and political structure were created by the same people that had denied them any right or dignity. Although the aesthetic and moral standards were dictated by dominant white culture, blacks were able to create their own, which diverged from the existing social order (Steinfeld, 2016).

The evolution of Blues music to Rhythm-and-Blues transitioned due to a new form of power dynamic between innovative blacks and popularization by whites in the United States (George, 1988). The exclusion of the creative black artist from positions of power within the newly commercialized music industry of the 20th century denied them copyright protection that initially created Rhythm and Blues music (Chapple, Garofalo 1980). It was not until World War II that the “forced under-ground” rhythm and blues artists were heavily nurtured by the newly established Southern African American immigrants who had earned enough money to become a distinct consumer group. This new consumer group influenced a few radio stations to introduce black-oriented programs which featured culturally inclusive themes (George, 1988). As a result, the genre of Rhythm-and-Blues spread nationally during World War II due to northern soldiers living in Southern military bases, as well as one million Southern blacks moving north in order to find economic opportunity through industrial employment. Culturally, the music of the new black southerner was Blues in a more commercial form, Rhythm-and-Blues, which, in addition to the electrified Blues guitar, incorporated piano, saxophone, a drumbeat and a heavy bass line (George, 1988).

The Cultural Significance of Dance & Movement

Fundamentally, Hanna (1987) acknowledged that “to dance is human and humanity universally expresses itself in dance through its ability to interweave with other aspects of human

life, such as communication and learning, belief systems, social relations, and political dynamics, loving and fighting, urbanization, and change” (p.3). Dance and movement have served as a primary form of communication, release, and healing for members of the African Diaspora even through the subsequent trials as slaves and free people on the North American continent (Farr, 1997). Dance/Movement has played a critical role in the lives of Black Americans and was considered their primary language of expression and relief through their journey as slaves and free people on the American continent (Farr, 1997).

Furthermore, dance is more than a form of healing for members of the African Diaspora, it is a symbol of the narrative within the individual (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). The nonverbal can be described as “text in motion” and as a result represents the experiences and give meaning to the individual’s mental, physical, and spiritual world (Monteiro & Wall, 2011). For people with African ancestry, the western approach to healing fails to consider all three components of the individual and as a result is not an adequate approach to healing for this population (Ojelade, McCray, Meyers & Ashby, 2014).

The significance of dance for the Black Community has been analyzed by Farr (1997) and has been rationalized by four key features:

1. Interaction to support a sense of community for the individual and to encourage the dynamic interactive dialogue of clapping, shaking hips, tapping feet, with verbal and musical expressions.
2. Improvisation reflects the range of adaptive functioning and promotes being in the present moment. Being present and having the flexibility to adapt are considered indicators of optimal health.

3. Integration to incorporate dance and music as a ritual of daily life. Art making should be a daily routine for members of the African Diaspora as it has served an intrinsic role in their existence.
4. Expression as a pivotal aspect of the music and dance experience. In where the performer values the quality of the exchange of emotion and communication.

Culturally, individuals of the African Diaspora have been traumatized through the voyage of slavery in the Americas and Caribbean islands (Herard-Marshall & Rivera, 2019). This trauma has forced these individuals to detach from their indigenous land, families, beliefs systems, and their bodies. Utilizing movement and touch to assist with reclaiming and relearning how to use their bodies to assist them with their unique and effective approaches to healing (Herard-Marshall & Rivera, 2019). Within the Dance/Movement Therapy community there is a collective knowing of how trauma is stored and released within the body. Dance/Movement Therapy is a useful method in rebuilding an individual's sense of self and relational capacity (Gray, 2001). Catalytically, life begins with the contingency of movement to stimulate the neural connectivity that in turn become responsible for the development of motor actions (Stanek, 2015). The onset of these motor actions influences the individual's perception of self, others, and the external world (Stanek, 2015). As the body is the source of pain and healing, the somatic symptoms of PTSS are related to the psychological distress (Gray, 2001). If the body and mind are connected, then the mind and body must be accessed to provide comprehensive healing. The psychological knowing of trauma and physical symptoms are interlaced and present outwardly as self-destructive behavior, shame, guilt, heightened startle response, psychosomatic disorders, somatic pain disorders, and nightmares (Gray, 2001). Attempting to define and describe these experiences that have been stored in the body can disrupt the mind to body continuum. Often the

utilization of language limits the individual's experience and the tacit knowing of the experience to metaphors and idioms that fail to capture the impact of the mind and body (Allodi, 1999). Collectively, using Dance/movement therapy to promote mind-body-spirit connections can implant a notion in the mind of perseverance to as Herard-Marshall & Rivera states, "fight and liberate the self, physically activate, claim, and re-occupy the body, and reconnect with spirit though the connection with ancestral embodied knowledge and values for strength and guidance" (2019).

Methods

In this section I will describe in detail the process of which this researcher piloted a culturally informed intervention for Black Women who are actively coping with the manifestation of trauma through R&B music and improvisational movement. This method consisted of five 30-minute sessions over the course of two weeks. Whereas I served as both researcher and participant, I will describe the method in which I created a "sensory sanctuary" of safety and confidence with the senses through improvisational movement, R&B music, and journaling. Initially, the design was to videotape each session. However, when videotaping this researcher noticed a lack of authenticity in movement and presence. Considering the fact that this method was created to express the vulnerable parts of self while saving space for strength; removing the videotaping equipment was a choice that aligns with the purpose of the creation of this method. Although this was not a linear process, this researcher will describe each process in alignment with the numerical order of Graphic 1 below.

Graphic 1

Preparing the Space (2 to 5 minutes)

While preparing for each session, I would confirm the availability of the space. Once the reservation was confirmed, this researcher assessed safety and removed any obstacles that could impair movement and prepared the art supplies for ease of accessibility. Next, this researcher would light an incense or utilize an oil diffuser to enhance the aromatherapeutic qualities of the room. Then, this researcher dimmed the lighting to a level where the aesthetic of the room would not impair the visibility of motion and space. Lastly, the preparation of the sound equipment would commence; being sure to have equipment charged and at a comfortable volume for the community.

Movement (15 to 20 minutes)

Movement was encouraged by clearing the space of obstacles and gently inviting the music into the space with an intentional volume. The spontaneous forms of non-verbal

expression through the body was stimulated through the use of music. This researcher defined movement into two categories; active and passive. Active movement utilizes 2 or more parts of the body. An example of active movement would be walking where two limbs are moving coupled with a natural arm flow. Whereas, passive movement uses less than two parts of the body with a degree of sustainment that may not be visible to an observer. An example of passive movement would stillness coupled with deep breathing.

Journaling & Art Making (5 to 8 minutes)

At any moment after the movement, the journaling and/or art making can commence, pause, and recommence. The journaling was in the format of writing and visual art due to the perceived therapeutic benefits of documenting the feelings of safety, to further express non-verbal communication, and to serve as a witness to the process. The supplies utilized were acrylic paint, oil pastels, watercolor, canvas, watercolor paper, water, and paint brushes of various sizes. The only directives provided for the journaling and art making process was to “Document what comes up.” All journal entries and art pieces created throughout this study will be utilized as data for the results.

Song Selection

Ten songs were thoughtfully selected to play and were on shuffle during each 30-minute session. Each song selected is classified as a Rhythm-and-Blues or Neo-Soul track. Although, there are numerous songs associated to the genre of Rhythm-and-Blues, the pre-requisites for a song to be selected for this method focused on a need for a mid to slow tempo that encouraged active listening, self-reflexivity through movement, and art making. The song selections, analysis, and lyrics of resonance to this researcher will be stated below in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Song Title	Artist	Analysis of Song	Lyrics of Resonance
Cranes in the Sky	Solange	A journey of escapism from depression, anxiety, and any source of painful feelings. An offer of understanding with process that comes from going inward.	<p>“I tried to keep myself busy. I ran around in circles, think I made myself dizzy.”</p> <p>“It’s like cranes in the sky. Sometimes, I don’t wanna feel those metal clouds.”</p>
F.U.B.U (For Us, By Us)	Solange	An unapologetically Black empowerment anthem that serves as a reminder of our entitlement to this land and equality alongside mentioning examples of micro-aggressive behaviors that come with the lived experience of people of color.	<p>“When it's going on a thousand years & you pulling up to your crib and they ask you where you live again. But you running out of damns to give.”</p> <p>“For us, this shit is from us. Get so much from us. Then, forget us.”</p>
I Keep	Jill Scott	<p>A song that shows the complexities of existing with negative experiences, processing the emotions and the “why” while continue to persevere.</p> <p>The second half of the song entitled “Still Here” offers affirmations to assist encourage perseverance, authenticity, and presence.</p>	<p>“Some of them wanna break you down. Steal your crown. Use and abuse you.”</p> <p>“I keep moving forward, pressing onward, striving further. I keep. Keep on laughing, keep on living, keep on loving, yeah. I keep Keep on dreaming, keep on achieving, keep on believing. I keep smiling when I come through & I cry when I need to.”</p> <p>“I am a source of power. I am excited journey. I am the rock of patience. I am a whisper singing. I am unbridled</p>

			<p>freedom. I am the thought from thinking. I am a love.”</p> <p>unshattered. I am the great orgasm & if you don't recognize my presence, I am here.”</p>
Brown Sugar	D’Angelo	<p>A jazzy vibe of a black man’s admiration, observation, and positive experience with a black woman.</p>	<p>“Oh, suga when you’re close to me, you love me right down to my knees”</p> <p>“Brown suga babe, I gets high off your love. Don’t know how to behave.”</p>
Lady	D’Angelo	<p>The singer is expressing his desire and level of commitment to this woman. The artist also expresses the desire that other people have for his woman.</p>	<p>“Don't think I don't see them looking at ya. All of them wishing they could have ya”</p> <p>“And every guy in the parking lot wants to rob me of my girl & my heart and soul, and everybody wants to treat me so cold.</p> <p>But I know I love you and you love me. There's no other lover for you or me. You're my lady”</p>
Bag Lady (Cheeba Sac Radio Edit)	Erykah Badu	<p>Badu sings to women who carry around emotional baggage from past relationships in which men did not treat them as they should have. Badu sings from the heart and with a lot of feeling. The artist ends the song with advice of “letting it go and staying light” as a remedy for self-preservation.</p>	<p>“One day, all dem bags gon’ get in your way. So, pack light.”</p> <p>“Girl I know sometimes it's hard & we can't let go. Oh, when someone hurts you oh so bad inside. You can't deny it you can't stop crying.”</p> <p>“I'm talking to my Gucci bag lady. Let it go, let it go, let it go, let it go. What about my paper sack lady? Bet ya love could make it better. Backpack on ya back, back lady? Bet ya love could make it better. What about my booty bag lady? Let it go, let it go, let it go, let it go.”</p>

Sweet Lady	Tyrese	The artist describes his desire to commit and provide consistency for a receptive divine feminine woman.	<p>“I never really seen your type. But I must admit that I kinda like. So, maybe, if you have the time, we could talk about you bein' my sweet lady. Would you be my sweet love for a lifetime? I'll be there when you need me. Just call and receive me.”</p> <p>“Say you will be my baby. Say you will be my lady. I've got to have all your love So, I won't even front.”</p>
Whoa	Snoh Aalegra	A woman expressing how her love interest makes her feel. The artist describes the feeling in true blues form by utilizing the voice to express and evoke emotion.	<p>“You make me feel and believe that we in paradise. 'Cause I don't feel the ground. No, I don't feel the ground. But I'm feelin' right, I'll tell you what it's all about 'Cause you're makin' me feel this way & it's kinda like whoa, Da-Da- Da-Daaa. Oh, you make me feel and believe, baby da-da-da-da-da-da-da”</p>
Everything is Everything	Lauryn Hill	A song of acknowledging what is happening, acceptance, and moving on as an act of growth and self-care.	<p>“Now everything is everything. What is meant to be, will be. After winter, must come spring. Change, it comes eventually.”</p> <p>“Let's love ourselves and we can't fail to make a better situation. Tomorrow, our seeds will grow. All we need is dedication.”</p>
So Beautiful	Musiq Soulchild	A man acknowledging the beauty of a woman and wanting to love and support her indefinitely.	<p>“Girl, don't you know, you're so beautiful? I wanna give all my love to you, girl. Not just a night but the rest of your life. I wanna be always here by your side.”</p>

The Community

As this is a pilot study, this researcher utilized self as instrument to create this intervention to support their identities. This researcher identifies as a CIS gendered female whose pronouns are, she/her. She was raised in a single-parent home where she saw her mother utilize the coping mechanism of SWS to provide for her. This researcher is from Atlanta, GA and regionally can attest to the influence of the Black Middle Class from the Southern corner of the United States of America influence on the cultural distribution of various art forms. Additionally, this researcher identifies as a fourth-generation survivor of intergenerational trauma as it relates to the definition of PTSS, childhood sexual trauma, and intimate partner violence and is dedicated to actively healing these parts of herself. She is a single mother, a scholar, and a researcher who is aware of the cultural implications and complexities of her identities and how they interconnect. This researcher's identities have placed both an invisible and visible need to define, strive, and assimilate to the Western Eurocentric definition of success. Yang defines the definition of success in America as, "the individual being the main character" (2001). Being a member of the African Diaspora, who indigenously has thrived upon the community or the "it takes a village" model; the pressure from the assimilation of "The American Dream" has taken a toll on this researcher's ability to acknowledge and authentically share vulnerabilities which has delayed requesting support from the community for the collective task at hand. The "Super Woman Schema" has presented this researcher the opportunity to seize opportunities that have elevated self, family, or community. However, to consistently exist in this narrative of "It's all up to me" is maladaptive. This maladaptive approach has predisposed this researcher to increased risk of exposure to intimate partner violence, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. It is to be known that the level of self-reflexivity that is required for this researcher to

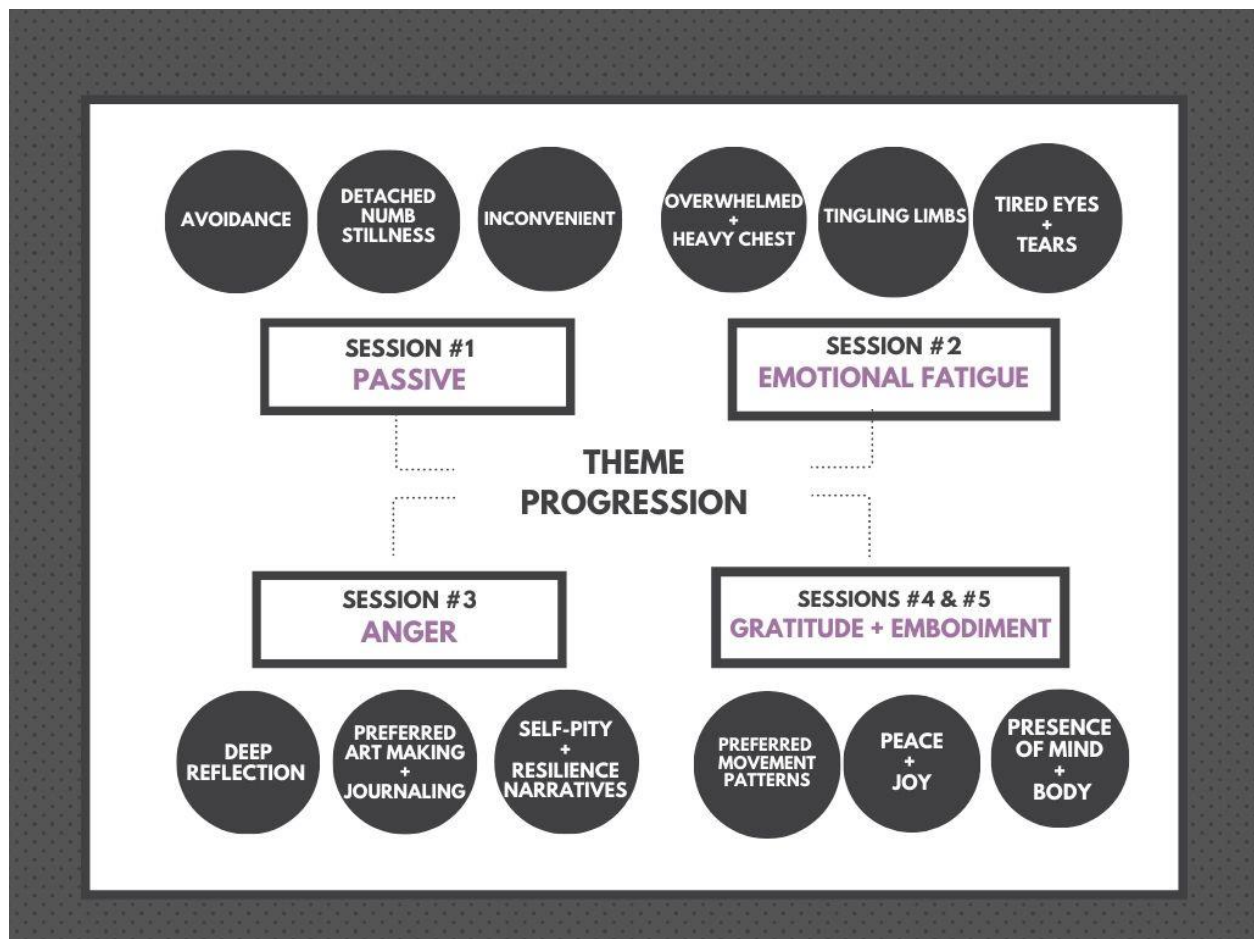
acknowledge, examine, and execute the activation of their community comes from a vulnerable communication with oneself. This method was the commencement of giving permission to this researcher to create a space of vulnerability, communication, and closure.

Results

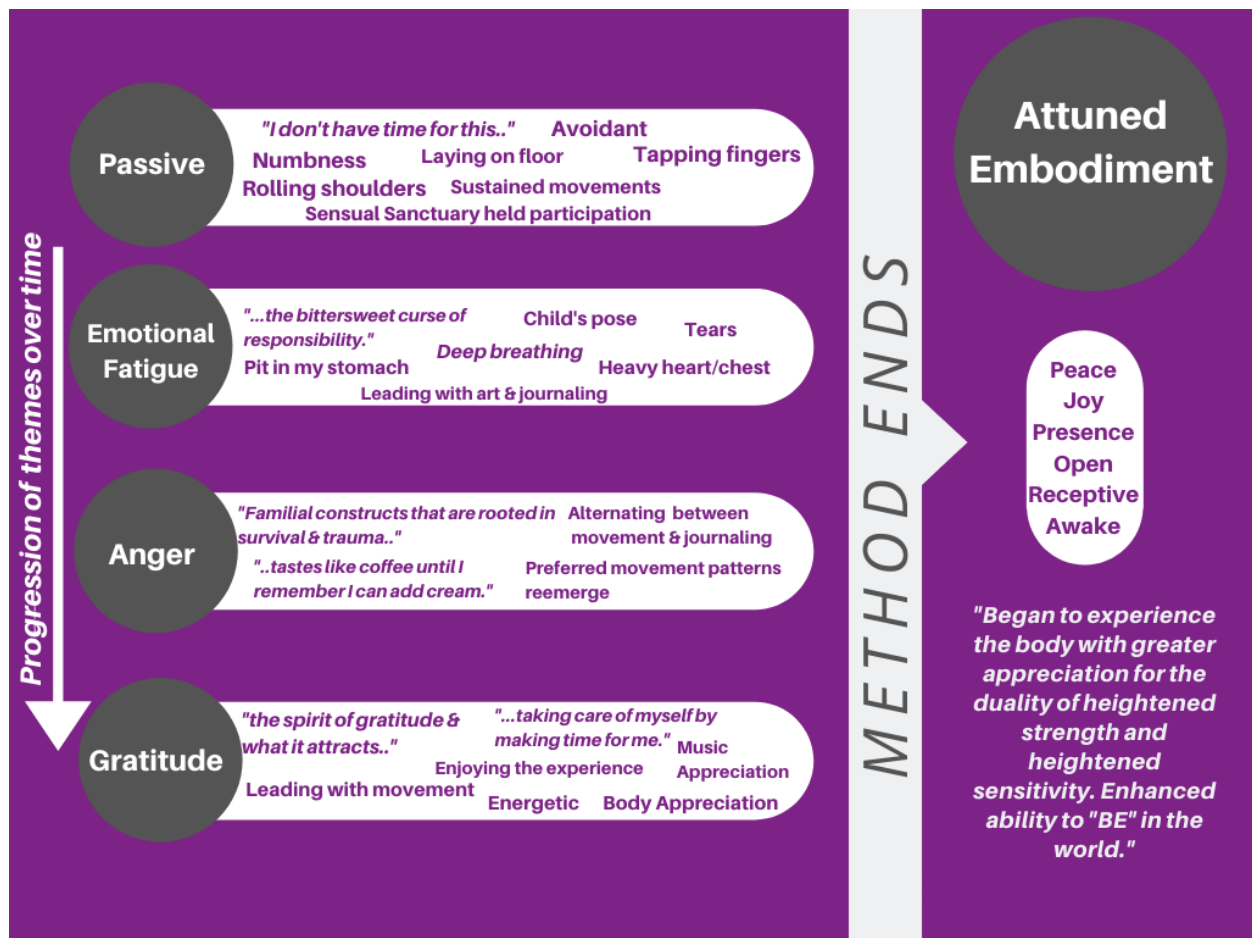
“The cure for pain is in the pain.”

-Rumi

Graphic 2



Graphic 3



Discussion

*"We all deserve a better life & it's up to us [the community] to make it that way."
-My Mother*

In this section I will discuss the tacit and tangible results from completing this method and implications for the future. As this researcher was the primary participant, in this section results will be self-reported with first-person language.

Music/Environment

The initial musical benefits I observed was how my body responded to the melodies permeating the space. Visually, I chose to move to only the light of my Himalayan Salt Lamp which produces a soft rose-pink glow in the room. The lighting worked to enhance a space that

was conducive to authentic vulnerability which was appropriate for this method. There was an overall feeling of liberation cascading over my body. The best way to explain this feeling was a tingling in my gut followed by a smile. The sound of the oil diffuser blowing out scented air and the dimmed lighting allowed my brain to really focus on the lyrical and melodic content of the music. The contrast of the seductive mid-to low tempo of the music coupled with the vulnerable exposure of authentic emotions and scenarios served as a model and gave me permission to do the same. I observed the adlibs and the bass of the songs which influenced a lot of my movements. The songs selected as referenced in Figure 2.1 being shuffled allowed the opportunity for each session to feel different. As sometimes the order felt so very aligned with what I was carrying into the session. The lyrical range of the songs selected array from the admiration of the black woman, to what it feels like to be devalued as a black woman and celebrating the resilience and strength of our ancestors and our life paths. On the occasion when the music was not as attuned to my personal disposition in that moment, the environment successfully held the space and produced the desired result of having a relaxing moment in solitude, peace, and reflection. Over time, the held environment of having space to just be in my element and reflect served as a catalyst for therapeutic shifts. My awareness of my emotions, emotional processing speed, ability to experience joy, and experience restful sleep were noticeably significant. One hypothesis, for these significant shifts were that I was able to deal with my subconscious and release any mental fog that was hovering over me.

Movement

Intentionally preparing the body and mind for a “deep dive” into the vulnerabilities presented brought about an initial feeling of numbness. The numbing feeling lead to an unexpected result for the initial session. The initial session consisted of passive movements such

as laying down, deep breathing, tapping fingers, and rolling the shoulders. I alternated from laying on my back taking deep breaths to rolling over and eventually ending in child's pose. The sustainment of my movements in the initial session were abnormal from my dominant movement preference. I noticed a need to stay slower than the beat and melody of the songs that were introduced into the space. Regardless of the shift in tempo from song to song, I remained in a sustained motion. Reflecting back, most of the body positioning exhibited in this initial session were developmentally significant in infants. Continuing on, my dominant movement preferences were introduced into the space. A descriptive summary of my dominant movement preference consists of a combination of spinal and hip movements within the head-tail connection coupled with my arms creating shapes that resemble waves or spirals. Additionally, I tend to spin and turn my whole body in space. With that being said, more of myself felt safe to express in the sensual sanctuary as evidenced by the lack of awareness of time while moving. I elevated from existing in the passive movement patterns to more active, authentic, and dynamic presence with my body. Unexpectedly, that presence within my body began to exist outside of the sensual sanctuary. I noticed a more in-depth experience of sensations with my body coupled with a heightened attunement with my body. I was able to maintain my dominant preferences for the remainder of this pilot study and transitioned outside of the "sensual sanctuary".

Art Making/ Journaling

It is important for me to express the immense level of vulnerability that arises from creating art and the additional layer that comes with sharing art that was created within that vulnerable state. That being said, the preliminary stages of this method were emotionally exhausting. Due to this fact, I am so grateful that there was a creative form of debriefing. I enjoyed the entire process of this method, but the most significant moments happened during the

debriefing period. The initial space to feel these feelings brought up the notion of familial and societal constructs for me. The combination of these constructs prompted me to reflect on my family's journey to The Americas. I began to reflect on the devaluation of black woman and limiting them to "mammies", "jazzebelles", and gynecological experiments. I created a piece using oil pastels and watercolor paper. It displays two silhouettes of curvy figures on opposing sides of each other. In the middle there was my interpretation of a "For Sale" sign with lettering that reads "My Brown Body is not" as pictured in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2



A significant moment during this method was falling to the floor in tears during "Cranes in the Sky" playing. After, a feeling of exhaustion, tired eyes, a pit in my stomach, and tingling limbs, overwhelmed my body and I chose to immediately use my movement time to write for the remaining 22 minutes of the session. Within another session, I wrote about *"the anger from the bittersweet curse of responsibility"* referencing the historical trauma processing that occurs when being culturally immersed. A key realization came out of this session, the attainment of success

and “*making it all by myself*” distances me from my ancestry and history which is a loss that my community is still grieving. I began to write four pages of how this bittersweet curse “*tastes like coffee until I remember I can add cream*”. Implying that I can choose to dwell and acknowledge AND move on to rejoice in “*the spirit of gratitude*”. By the last two sessions, I wrote more about that spirit of gratitude and what it attracts. The spirit of gratitude has granted me a grander level of peace by acknowledging the foundational blessings that I receive daily. I noticed that I began to express gratitude on paper and began experiencing or “embodying joy, embodying peace, and embodying presence” which was a new feeling for me. I have experienced these emotions multiple times within my life but to be in a more consistent state of peace, joy, and presence was a profound shift. I noticed the comfort with being myself, trusting my bodily reactions to guide me, and was able to advocate boundaries and emotions with greater ease. Within those last two sessions, I focused on the beauty of my identities and the admiration that has been given to me in respect to each identity. Specifically, an image of the flowers I received months ago from a loved one resurfaced. I enjoy receiving flowers especially unexpectedly and began to recreate the image of the gift. I was led to pause and just reflect on the vase. The background of this particular art piece, pictured below as Figure 3, is abstract in nature, but the centered vase is “*empty and unfinished*.” I carried a level of resistance to not finishing this piece by adding a floral arrangement. Reflecting back, I see this vase as “*open and receptive*”, similarly to the elevated and emotionally available me.

Figure 3

Overall, it may be said the benefits of the artmaking and journaling served as a witness and a tangible place to hold all I was feeling. The ability to be vulnerable and have a place to feel everything that you are not “allowed” to experience publicly, within the sensual sanctuary utilizing my body, art-making, and journal shifted my spirit. When there was resistance to this process, the intentionality of the sensual sanctuary held the space and allowed me to persist. These results will vary and bring about different realizations for different individuals at different time frames.

Conclusion

A significant awareness came from going to the attuned place through this method, “Making it all by myself” is a value that does not align with my culture. The value of independence is a derivative of oppressive cultures. Creating a space to intentionally explore the attuned place allowed me to connect with the heart, culture, and mourn the loss of my ancestry. The loss of my ancestry and innate ancestral concepts is a loss that I and the community deserve to acknowledge and reclaim. The remedy lies in creating sacred, culturally informed, spaces to reconnect, mourn, and celebrate our ancestry while rehumanizing our beings. In summary, this

method focuses on utilizing the community, expressing vulnerability, and actively exploring a relationship with one's emotions as a strength resulted in a rehumanizing experience.

In the future, I would like to see this method utilized for women of all ethnicities and walks of life. I would like to see other researchers self-assess their overlapping identities and create interventions for trauma that speak directly to their communities and identities. Lastly, I would be interested to see this method utilized in a group setting, where the benefits that Farr (1997) mentions of community, integration, improvisation, and interaction could be potentially experienced during each session.

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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