

GIVING VOICE TO VIOLENCE OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM TRAUMA

This is my story: Bringing voice to the violence of anti-Black racism trauma with African Nova Scotians through digital storytelling

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As an African Nova Scotian, I can trace my maternal and paternal lineage back over five generations; however, it is likely more. Hailing from "The Island", in Truro, Nova Scotia, I pride myself on the community that I grew up in and the familial roots that have shaped my identity: East Preston, Africville, Shelburne, and North Preston. With this, I must honour the contributions and persistent efforts of the African Nova Scotian Community. Adopting the Nova Scotia

Human Rights Commission's acknowledgment, I pay homage to my people. Despite facing racial injustices, we have tirelessly advocated for policies and legislation to safeguard our community's human rights. The history and resilience of African Nova Scotians can be traced back over 400 years. Despite unfulfilled promises and a discriminatory environment, we have made and continue to make substantial contributions to all aspects of life in Nova Scotia. We, and the larger community alike, must acknowledge and name our trauma, resilience, and significant contributions to the province and country.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, my ancestors, and my community, over 400 years strong in the province of Nova Scotia. I thank God for providing me the strength, skills, and grace to be able to serve my people in passion and purpose.

Abstract

This qualitative research study explored and examined with six African Nova Scotian participants (co-researchers) their experiences of race-based trauma, and the ways these experiences impacted their overall well-being and quality of life. Specifically, I addressed the research question: What are the Indigenous ANS' experiences of race-related trauma and how have these experiences impacted their overall well-being and quality of life? The study used an arts-based research method: digital storytelling.

There is a growing body of literature examining the intersections and complexities of race-related experiences that have been identified as traumatic by those who experience them. This study looks explicitly at the relationship between racism, trauma, and Indigenous African Nova Scotians' overall quality of life through their own accounts with a group of six co-researchers. Indigenous African Nova Scotian refers to those whose ancestors had arrived in Nova Scotia as early as the early 1700s, which are a group distinct from more recent Black immigrants (Elliott Clark, 2012).

Using Digital Storytelling (DST), co-researchers created a two to five-minute mini-movie articulating their traumatic experience(s) with racism and its impact on their lives. Co-researchers participated in three two-hour group workshops, during which they engaged in finding their story, telling their story, crafting the story and sharing the story.

Informed by theories such as Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome Theory, Africentric Theory and Critical Race Theory, this study acknowledges the intersectional nuances of how anti-Black racism has been experienced with co-researchers. The recognition of structural and systemic anti-Black racism is reflected in the co-researchers' digital stories. The resiliency and critical hope for equity and healing have also been made evident through their ability to take appropriate

action against the assaults of anti-Black racism. Study recommendations point to the need to expand education, including African Nova Scotian-centred/Africentric pedagogies, to contextualize this reality into trauma-informed care in education. Additionally, this study provides further evidence of the value of DST as a research method for individual, communal, institutional, and structural transformation.

Keywords: anti-Black racism, African Nova Scotian, digital storytelling, racial trauma, resilience, education, health and well-being, Africentricity, critical race theory, post-traumatic slave syndrome

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will introduce this doctoral research study, which, through digital storytelling (DST), explores the impact of anti-Black racism trauma on the quality of life of Indigenous African Nova Scotian (ANS)s¹. The research statement and research question will be stated in this chapter to set the context for this study's rationale. Finally, locating myself as the researcher of this study will be discussed.

Introduction to the Research Problem

This study addresses an ongoing concern affecting ANSs. Anti-Black racism has been embedded in policies and practices within Nova Scotia for centuries (Pachai, 1990; Walker, 1979; Whitfield, 2004; Williams, 2013.) Since the arrival of people of African descent to North America via the trans-Atlantic slave trade, there has been a reality of deep-rooted trauma, inhumane treatment, and a second-class status. This history has become an intergenerational narrative as the enduring of injury, a result of the legacy of slavery, and racism is remembered and experienced in present times, in a multitude of systemically embedded ways.

¹ "...Distinguishes those of us of long residency in Nova Scotia [as early as the early 1700s], in Canada, from more recent Black arrivals, most from the Caribbean and a smattering from the United States and from Africa" (W. Borden as cited in Clarke, n.d., para. 1.) "to demarcate this small, forgotten band of African (more or less) Americans from other, newer Black Canadians because we were, in fact, different, despite our allegiance to the rhetoric of pan-Africanism" (Clarke, n.d., para. 1.)

The violence of anti-Black racism continues to be perpetrated today, in institutions and systems, built on the belief of white superiority and Black inferiority. The residual effects and implications of such violence are a form of trauma that Black people in North America now live with and experience daily, which can be understood as post traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS) (DeGruy, 2005; Leary, 2001). The excess stress, directly resulting from enslavement, that Black people experience perpetuates anti-Black racism, serving as a continued attack on the Black person's psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. The narratives that tell the story of traumatic impact are not always acknowledged or told. When these narratives are shared outside of the ANS community, they are often met with resistance and an unwillingness to accept that what is being described is real or true. Additionally, there is a reluctance to acknowledge the severity of these types of attacks; rather, they are downplayed, ignored, or denied. Wise (2011) writes in his book, *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*, that there are many whites who downplay these harms as a way of protecting their racial advantage, which operates in invisible and insidious ways. Non-Black people question the legitimacy of such experiences and the resulting impacts on individuals, and further, the community.

Sarkis (2018) discusses how these experiences can be contextualized through 'gaslighting': a term referring to psychological manipulation with the intent of making someone doubt their own memories, perceptions, or sanity. The implications of gaslighting have been exemplified in the findings of this study. The reality of feeling the need to try to convince another person about their own experience of racism can be a barrier to care, and ultimately, a contributor to negative health outcomes. Although Nova Scotia boasts a history of manipulation, sacrifice, dehumanization, and maltreatment that has gone unrecognized, devalued, and repeatedly challenged, there is also an undoubtable legacy of a unique resilience and

perseverance, as people of African descent are still here. By naming and creating for ourselves culturally responsive opportunities that mainstream society has excluded and continues to exclude us from, we have not only survived but have thrived.

Recognizing that there is a need for more ANS centred research, exposing and unpacking the significant impacts of anti-Black racism, I arrived at a topic that felt necessary to explore. Merriam (2009) discusses how the selection of a topic involves making a connection to one's everyday life, one's curiosities; life's problems one may ponder on, or the question of why things are the way they are, for example. She claims that in fields such as education and social work, an individual's interests encompass personal interests from both in the field and the work site itself, but that a topic can come from additional other sources. As a social worker by profession, my interests do lie within the scope of my practice, being familiar with the various ways that trauma can manifest within individuals resulting from direct lived experiences; however, there is more to it for me. As an ANS social worker, I come with a culturally informed lens that considers trauma as encompassing more than solely a lived experience that one individual has faced.

With storytelling being central to addressing this study's research question, it is appropriate to include a story in this chapter that in part led me to this topic. In 2020, I witnessed a recording of a beautiful strong Black woman being tackled by three white male police officers in a public space- a store in Halifax. I had never witnessed such excessive force used on anyone reported in the news of Nova Scotia before. I had never heard of an unarmed woman being considered such a threat that three officers were required to 'control' her. While I was not there, the power of twenty-first century technology; in this case, the cell phone and social media, enabled viewers to bear witness to this assault. I have seen and heard through the media of unarmed Black women being violently attacked physically and/or verbally by police and other

authoritative personnel. Viola Desmond, Rosa Parks, Sandra Bland, and Breyonna Taylor are all Black women who have been victimized by the patriarchal white supremacy of white male police officers. However, it is not just white male police officers who impose such power over racialized people. It is also some of our local merchants, classroom teachers, and political figures, to name a few. Not only was the survivor of this attack a Black woman; she was also a Black mother whose two young children witnessed their mother being abused by the police. What could they have been thinking? What could they have been feeling? What happened to them after the shock of this experience? Will this memory stay with them and how have they coped? Further, how did their mother feel about not being able to protect them from witnessing her being violently assaulted?

When I reflect on when my fight for social justice began, I believe it started before my birth. Due to my lineage and heritage of Black ancestry and legacy, being a change agent has always been part of my identity. African people being stolen from their land and conditioned to believe that they were not and would never be as good as their captors is a harsh reality to comprehend. My family, who are people of strength, wisdom, and leadership, have exemplified what it means to challenge oppression. My existence in this world tells a story of the past, present, and future. This is a story of pain, sacrifice, resilience, and empowerment. It is also a story of injustice, lies of inferiority, and division, yet also unity. Although we may not know what the future story entails, I can promise that it will be one of a continued strength to fight for our rights, collective empowerment, and spiritual prosperity.

As a clinician and community-centred practitioner, I feel that I have a duty to give back to my community. Acknowledging intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) and my own social location of privilege and oppression, I am honoured to serve my community through

opportunities to conduct research with them. Sitting with the power that I hold as a scholar has encouraged me to consider these opportunities as acts of resistance to anti-Black racism and open invitations for education within the broader community.

The quality of life or the holistic well-being of people of African descent has always been something at the forefront of my heart and mind. From the time I was a little girl, I have been invested in developing my cultural identity through engagement with family, friends, and peers in social gatherings; by reading, playing, and creating content with people and characters that looked like me and my family; attending culturally specific, community-driven programs; and engaging in community activism and advocacy. I have always had a healing spirit and desire to ensure that people were feeling well, supported, like they belonged, and that they mattered. As I get older and gain more experience, I see more and more of how I have always embodied these qualities in a variety of ways. Now, I find myself as a doctoral student, still caring about the well-being of people of African descent. I wonder how ANSs, a distinct and unique population of people who have been in Mi'kma'ki for over four centuries, have survived and thrived despite the traumatic effects of enslavement, racism, and discrimination across the life span. With so much loss experienced, we created new opportunities and ways of doing and living, making “a way out of no way”. Resilience is often a term that we are labeled with and many of us identify with this term in many ways. Wu et al. (2013) refer to Russo et al. (2012), Rutter (2012b), and Southwick and Charney (2012) to define resilience as “the capacity and dynamic process of adaptively overcoming stress and adversity while maintaining normal psychological and physical functioning” (p. 1). Acknowledging the need to ensure ecological and cultural sensitivity, world renowned resilience researcher, Dr. Michael Unger says that:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of

individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways. (Resilience Research, n.d.)

It is my belief that resilience is contextual and needs to be examined with an intersectional and critical lens. Resilience cannot be defined in one way for all people. In other words, it does not hold the same meaning for all experiences in the same way. Regarding racialized groups, resilience must be examined through a racial and cultural lens that considers historical and generational trauma; systemic, institutional, and societal injustices; and exclusionary measures such as adequate education, employability, and appropriate healthcare treatment, for example.

Although the idea of being resilient may be something many ANSs identify with, I wonder about the impact that being resilient or developing resilience has had on our lives overall. For some of us, does being resilient mean having to sacrifice our dignity, integrity, and basic human rights, to no cause or fault of our own? How has anti-Black racism combined with the concept of resilience affected ANSs' well-being and lives overall? There is a need to explore ANSs' stories about resilience and bring more awareness to their lived experiences, which this study has done.

The history of people of African descent in North America is crucial to understanding the social constructs of race and racism. This study provides a solid argument that racism is a form of trauma that can have lifelong impacts on people of African ancestry. Considering the participatory nature of this study, I refer to my participants as "co-researchers" (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Bernard, et al., (2022) state that, "research conducted within the ANS community must be both with and for the people. It is essential to establish a level of trust and

understanding between participants and researchers to achieve an authentically mutual goal” (p. 4). Scholars have affirmed that a participatory approach to research facilitates a model of shared ownership of the research, a community-centred examination of socially rooted issues that impact the community, and an opportunity toward collective action and change (Bernard et al., 2022; Etowa et al., 2007; Gaffney, 2008).

This study comes at a contemporary historical moment in North America, with media attention being paid (2013-2020) to the countless murders of Black people in North America by the hands of police and people in positions holding some level of authority (Alexander, 2012; Maynard, 2017). The murder of Trayvonne Martin in 2013 in Florida, USA, by George Zimmerman, a local resident and member of neighborhood watch began the traction of what we now know as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Chase, 2018). The hashtag “BlackLivesMatter” began showing up on social media in 2013 in response to Trayvonne’s murder. With repeated examples of Black people as victims of police brutality, members of the African American and African Canadian communities began to rally and protest the atrocities. In 2020, the death of George Floyd served as another rallying cry for people of all races and cultures to demand justice and police reform.

There is a need to draw attention to the “racially turbulent Trump U.S. Presidential administration” (Cooper, 2022, p. 42) that took place in 2016 until 2020. The administration exposed the world to the continual threat and violence of White supremacy in North America. Four years later, we see a re-elected Trump as U.S. president, despite lack of presidential qualifications, criminal charges, convictions, and overt and blatant acts of racism and sexism. Trump beat out the Democratic Party’s candidate, Vice President Kamala Harris, the first woman, the first Black American, and the first South Asian American women to be elected as

Vice President (The Whitehouse, n.d.). While these are American examples of the implications of anti-Black racism, the effects have spilled into Canadian media and affected Canadians (The Canadian Press, 2024, November 6.)

In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) brought greater awareness to the genocide of Indigenous Children through Indian residential schools (Government of Canada, 2024, May 28.) The 2021 discovery of 215 Indigenous children's unmarked graves found in British Columbia, alerted the nation to pay attention. The "Every Child Matters" campaign signifies the honouring and remembrance of the thousands of Indigenous children who were sent to residential schools and their families, and the nation's commitment to TRC. We have observed the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation or "Orange Shirt Day" annually since 2021 on September 30th (Orange Shirt Society, n.d.; Save the Children, 2024.) More Equity Diversity Inclusion and Accessibility (EDIA) policies in public institutions such as post-secondary and within government are being developed in Canada. In Nova Scotia, the Dismantling Racism and Hate Act was passed in 2022 where it specifically notes " it is important to recognize the heritage of African Nova Scotian communities and the contributions they have made and continue to make to Nova Scotia" (Nova Scotia Legislature, n.d.) Despite these legislated and sociopolitical examples, racist attitudes continue to permeate the climate with push back against authentic commitments to EDIA.

Research Statement and Questions

Recognizing the traumatic experiences from a long-standing history of enslavement and anti-Black racism, for over 400 years in Nova Scotia which continues into present day, I was interested in understanding what emotional and psychological impacts these traumatic experiences have had intergenerationally on ANS people. While there are studies that have

explored experiences and certain outcomes of racism on ANSs (Beagan, Etowa, & Bernard, 2011; BLAC, 1994; Boudreau, 2015; Este & Bernard, 2003; James et al., 2010; Ruck, 1999; Waldron, 2014; Williams, 2013), there is a gap in literature that explores explicitly the relationship between trauma, racism, and overall quality of life. Moreover, in the context of trauma, there is minimal research that explores intergenerational trauma and its impact on the current generation. Further, the impact of these experiences of race-related traumas for a distinct group, ANSs, has not been explored in the literature.

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine a group of six Indigenous ANS' experiences of race-related trauma and how these experiences have impacted their overall well-being and quality of life. I assert that trauma and race are interconnected, and intergenerational racism can result in a multitude of outcomes. For this research, race-related trauma will be defined in the context of anti-Black racism experienced directly, indirectly, and/or vicariously.

The primary research question of this study is: What are the Indigenous ANSs' experiences of race-related trauma and how have these experiences impacted their overall well-being and quality of life? Additionally, I sought to address these sub-research questions:

- 1) Do Indigenous ANSs of varying genders experience race-related trauma differently? If so, in what ways?
- 2) Do generations of Indigenous ANSs ages 19+ experience race-related trauma differently? If so, in what ways?
- 3) How do Indigenous ANS adults ages 19+ survive, cope with, and/or address race-related trauma? How have their coping choices impacted their life overall?
- 4) How is individual and collective resilience identified and embodied in the Indigenous ANS community?
- 5) How might Indigenous ANSs experience individual and/or collective healing?

This chapter summarized the purpose for conducting this doctoral research study, which explored the impact of experiences of anti-Black racism trauma on the quality of life of Indigenous ANSs through DST. Acknowledging what I bring to this study process as a researcher and Indigenous ANS community member was also discussed. Lastly, the research statement and research questions and sub-questions were presented. The next chapter will provide an in-depth review of the literature supporting this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intent of this chapter is to present a comprehensive review of the literature that supports this study's purpose and the research question that guides it. This literature review offers a historical context and acknowledgment of the multi-century presence of ANS people in this province. It references the many challenges, barriers, and exclusionary measures that have been placed on this group of people. Additionally, this review is inclusive of the growing evidence of anti-Black racism as a form of trauma with various implications on the quality of life for Black people. The review introduces Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS) as a condition and explores responses to race-based trauma. It concludes with the theories that have informed this research, which compose the study's theoretical framework.

At the heart of the history of enslaved Africans is deep-rooted trauma, pain, and sacrifice. The enduring of injury, resulting from enslavement and racism, is remembered and continuously shared through generations. The institutions and systems that we navigate as people of African descent are built on the belief of white superiority and Black inferiority. Recognizing the ways in which racism has negatively impacted the ANS population, including the silencing of their voices, it is necessary to hold space for the stories and lived experiences to be shared. Although the experiences of trauma have been passed down from previous generations, so too are ways of survival and resilience. My literature review will seek to uncover the manifestations of the legacy of slavery and race-related stress and trauma as it relates to people of African descent in North America. It will also highlight the resilience of these populations through their innovative and effective interventions, models of practice, and recommendations for implications in practice.

Literature Review Methodology

The following integrated literature review is a synthesis of identified available literature regarding cultural trauma and DeGruy-Leary's (2001; 2005) PTSS: a condition that African Americans may experience resulting from the residual effects of slavery. These effects have contributed to many of the health inequities that are present within the Black population, as well as to the disparities of Black over and underrepresentation in varying systems.

I would argue that this revelation is more than an American experience; descendants of enslaved Africans in Canada, particularly in Nova Scotia, experienced these effects similarly, and perhaps differently in some ways. This literature review will support such claim, outlining this history of slavery and ongoing racial assaults of institutional, structural, and systemic oppression in Nova Scotia toward this population. Moreover, it will seek to acknowledge the ways that anti-Black racism, race-based trauma, and race-related stress have all impacted ANS people, including effects on their overall health and well-being. A discussion on the coping and survival strategies of ANS people will be explored with an emphasis on gender analysis. Expanding on PTSS, to argue its validity, a review of studies that have drawn and built on this theory will be provided, including those focusing on effective interventions in varying contexts addressing race-related trauma. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) will also be included, to demonstrate how experiences of discrimination in the early years can impact one's life. Recommendations for people of African descent to move forward in their collective healing from the lie of Black inferiority, as well as the role that non-Black people can have as allies in this process, will be briefly referenced.

Through reviewing over 100 articles, books, and other scholarly works, I have built upon my knowledge and comprehension of the emergence of research related to intergenerational and

cultural trauma with people of African descent in North America; the effect of such trauma as it relates to their collective identities and quality of life; and how this is being addressed and conceptualized.

I will use themes to organize and present the literature reviewed to support this research study's importance. The themes will explain the historical injury and exclusionary practices of enslaved Africans in North America, and more specifically, Nova Scotia, as well as anti-Black racism as a source of excessive stress and trauma.

Theme Rationale

Much of the literature exploring the effects of slavery as traumatic, and further, racism as a trauma, is centred on the African American experience. However, it is necessary to draw attention to the institution of slavery that occurred in Canada, with a particular focus on Nova Scotia. The literature available on enslavement from an African American context appears to omit the experiences of African Canadians. Perhaps this is because there is a perception, created through false teachings, that Canada was the land of the free (Cottreau-Robins, 2014). Drawing from research examining history closer, we can understand that slavery was very much connected to the development of Nova Scotia (Cottreau-Robins, 2014; Este & Bernard, 2003; Pachai, 1987; Walker, 1979; Whitfield, 2004, 2012). Given that my research interests are rooted in the examination and conceptualization of trauma with ANSs, it is critical to provide a concise yet comprehensive review of the history of people of African descent in Nova Scotia, freed and enslaved, and the unjust maltreatment, dehumanization, and repeated experiences of exclusion. The inclusion of this literature supports the evidence of racist injury and trauma endured resulting from slavery and the continued perpetuation of the violence of anti-Black racism.

The argument that racism is a form of trauma is asserted through a close look into the meaning of trauma beyond its traditional sense. Scholars, such as Eyermam (2001); and Alexander et al. (2004) have examined the traumatic experiences of collective groups who have been the targets of racism and discrimination of various kinds, including slavery. Arguably, the trans-Atlantic slave trade was the most horrific act of terrorism (DeGruy, 2005). Specific to the experience of chattel slavery, DeGruy (2005) explored the trauma and injury that was not only endured during times of slavery in America, but also the intergenerational manifestations of trauma resulting from slavery that we see today. To understand this, she developed a theory called Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS).

Scholars (Holloran, 2019; Spencer & Perlow, 2018) have built upon DeGruy's work, utilizing her theory as a framework for understanding the state of African American communities in present day, including the psychosocial implications. African Canadian scholars have also touched on the effects of race-related stress, specifically recognizing the negative impacts of this stress on the health of ANSs (Beagan et al., 2012; Este & Bernard, 2003), as well as the overrepresentation of this population in the justice system (Williams, 2013) and on Individual Program Plans (IPPs) in school (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016). Other scholars (e.g. Spencer & Perlow, 2018) have taken this a step further to analyze the ways in which people of European descent in America have also experienced the aftermath of slavery, through what they call Post Traumatic Slave Master Syndrome (PTSMS). In addition, white racism trauma has been named an extension of trauma theory in the work of Danzer (2012).

Considering this understanding of trauma as it applies to descendants of enslaved African people in North America, seeking to acknowledge the resiliency and hope of this group as a

collective is crucial. Despite the trauma endured, Black people have continued to survive. However, a question remains: have we collectively healed from this trauma? Interestingly, much of the existing literature draws upon the resilience of this population as a foundation in the healing process. DeGruy's (2005) work uncovers a multitude of ways that we see the manifestations of slavery survival strategies in current times, as they have been passed down intergenerationally and adapted over time. She provides an example of this, presenting a story of a Black mother who although was very proud of her child, neglected to praise him to a white mother as a form of protection; a strategy that enslaved people used out of the fear that drawing positive attention to their child would result in them being auctioned off. If we first understand that many of us are living with the post-traumatic symptoms of slavery, then perhaps, collectively and individually, we might reconsider our internalized responses to racism and challenge our beliefs of how we should show up in this world, aligning with scholars' (Eyerman, 2001, DeGruy, 2005; Halloran, 2019) discussions surrounding the shaping of the Black identity as a result of this history and continued oppression. An outstanding question remains: how does this possibly contribute to the idea of healing that DeGruy (2005) calls for? Further, my interests in holistic healing and well-being in all aspects of the ANS quality of life? An exploration of literature that unpacks coping strategies of ANS high school students responding to race-related stress (Ruck, 1997), as well as a separate study of 50 ANS women coping with race-related stress (Beagan, Etowa, & Bernard, 2014), support the claims that racism can result in stress accumulation. Moreover, scholars have recognized the importance of bringing to light the resiliency and strength of people of African descent, despite the race-related trauma endured. Studies have also identified survival strategies for ANS men. With interest in examining trauma

from an intergenerational and gendered lens, this literature review will also facilitate a gendered analysis.

Sources that explored race-related issues but did not offer interventions or suggestions for healing and healthy coping as study outcomes were also excluded. Because I am interested in the action-orientation that research can facilitate, as well as the implications for education in formal and non-formal contexts, it was important to identify effective interventions and strategies that fostered healing-centred models and approaches. Most of the studies referencing PTSS theory that I will review will be included to support the validity of this evolving theory. Noting that cultural trauma is not as well-developed as traditional trauma-informed theories and pedagogies, a brief overview on potential criticisms of this phenomenon will also be discussed.

Theme 1: The African Nova Scotian experience of enduring injury from a historical to present day understanding

The arrival of Black people in Nova Scotia. Africans' experiences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade can be argued as the worst kind of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse (DeGruy, 2005). From the time of their capture, African people suffered loss in a magnitude of ways, including their freedom, family, values, way of life, and cultural identity. They have endured a great deal of sacrifice, cruelty, and trauma. It has been estimated that 10 to 15 million enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas, with millions more who died en route the slave ship (DeGruy, 2005). Although enslaved Africans were brought to various states of the United States of America, slavery did not end at those borders. Many of us know the predominant narrative of enslavement in America's south; however, the history expands across waters to Canada, particularly, Nova Scotia. To understand the connection of enslavement to Nova Scotia, we must unpack the migration of those Africans both freed and in bondage. It is

from these ancestors who chose to make this province their home, that we now have a distinct and resilient collective of people who we now know to be the ANS community.

Writers (Boudreau, 2015; Clairmont & McGill, 1970; Couttreau-Robbins, 2014; Este & Bernard, 2003; Hamilton 1994, 2015; Pachai, 1987; Walker, 1979; Whitfield, 2004) have written about the history of people of African descent in Nova Scotia. The story of freedom via the underground railroad, along with the stories of settlement in this province by the Black Planters, Black Loyalists, Jamaican Maroons, Black Refugees, and the Caribbean migration, is only part of the history. There was more to this picture, this reality, with slavery also being a present institution in Nova Scotia's history.

The earliest account of Black presence can be traced back to 1633 with Olivier Le Jeune. Records show that he was a household servant or slave for approximately twenty years, as slavery had ended in New France the year prior to his arrival (Boudreau, 2015; Este & Bernard, 2003; Walker, 1979). Mathieu Da Costa has also been identified as one of the first recorded free Black persons in Canada, arriving in the early seventeenth century as a translator between the French and the Mi'kmaw (ANSA, 2019). The literature tells us that between 1749 and 1816, approximately 7,000 people of African descent migrated to Nova Scotia. It can be estimated that over 1,200 enslaved people arrived with their white Loyalists (Whitfield, 2004). There were some formerly enslaved, now free, people of African descent who also arrived, while others arrived as possessions or property of their masters. Nova Scotia was indeed influenced by ideals and practices valuing white superiority and Black inferiority, as many European immigrants brought with them their teachings and beliefs from colonies in the United States (Whitfield, 2004). Although this province did not depend on the institution of slavery as many states did, slavery certainly contributed to its development (Couttreau-Robbins, 2014; Walker, 1979;

Whitfield, 2004). As Cottreau-Robins (2014) has found, enslaved Africans were responsible for developing the new land promised to their white Loyalists, while Black loyalists were left with barren lots. The Nova Scotian laws supported slavery, and enslaved Africans were viewed as possessions. Clearly demonstrated in the living arrangements of masters compared to their slaves, there was a distinct socioeconomic divide.

This class hierarchy was not just observed with those in bondage. For those people of African descent who were free, they were most certainly not seen as equal. As Whitfield (2004) states, the inequities executed had represented almost a “surrogate for slavery” (p.109). Unfulfilled promises of land and employment opportunities led to them leaving their own barren communities to go inner city or town to work for white men for cheap labour (Clairmont & McGill, 1970; Este & Bernard, 2003; Pachai, 1987; Walker, 1979). Certain laws prevented Black folk from accessing places and required them to be back to their homes by dusk until dawn (Williams, 2013). In fact, the public attitude towards ANSs became more negative, and by 1815, the Nova Scotia assembly attempted to ban further Black immigration. In general, it was believed by white Nova Scotians that Black people were lazy and were consequently dependent on the white community; thus, they were seen as a negative influence on the economy (Este & Bernard, 2003; Walker, 1979).

For some, this quality of life was unbearable: “For the typical Black Loyalist, the encounter with white society provoked physical suffering, humiliation and insecurity” (Walker, 1985). In 1972, when the opportunity arose for voyage to Freeport, Sierra Leone, many seized it (Este & Bernard, 2003; Walker 1985). This was true for the Jamaican Maroons, as well, who marked their presence in Nova Scotia from 1796 to 1800 (Whitfield, 2004). Deported to Halifax after the British conquered Jamaica, the Maroons worked as labourers building Halifax’s citadel.

Although a short stay, they contributed immensely to the city. Like the Black Loyalists, some Maroons left for Freeport soon after; however, some did choose to stay and create a new life for themselves and their families (Walker, 1979). The African American refugees from the War of 1812 found their way here with unfulfilled promises made to them. With the choice to stay also came much hardship, underlined by anti-Black racist attitudes and worldviews. Without adequate resources, people of African descent in this province had to create for themselves (Boudreau, 2015; Este & Bernard, 2003) and develop their own survival strategies to adapt in their new environment.

Systemic exclusion. The inequities built on white and Black relations in Nova Scotia can be observed in many of our central systems today, such as within the justice system (Williams, 2013), healthcare systems (Beagan, Etowa, & Bernard, 2012; James et al., 2010), and education system (BLAC, 1994; Boudreau, 2015). To support her claim that the law has been influenced by anti-Black racist attitudes and beliefs, Williams (2013) provides examples of police brutality that has happened in Nova Scotia. She argues that the law was used to keep ANSs ‘in their place’ (p.429). When guilty of committing an offense, ANSs were more likely than their white counterparts to be publicly whipped as punishment, with this method of punishment continuing into the 1820s (Whitfield, 2004). In addition, Williams (2013) summarizes that jury laws excluded ANSs from 1890 until 1943 and African Canadians were sentenced to hang in disproportionate numbers under Canada’s capital punishment provisions.

It is important to note that within Canada, ANSs represent one of the most exploited and oppressed groups (Este & Bernard, 2003; James et al., 2010; James & Lloyd, 2013). To put into present day context, Williams’ (2013) sharing of an ANS man who was shot and left to die by a white man has left a haunting impact to this day on the community where this offense took place.

In October of 2019, an ANS man left his home one day to find Halloween decorations that depicted figures with Black faces hanging by their necks from tree branches. Jones (2019, November 6), the author of a news article about the incident, explains that for Black people, the figures evoke images of lynching. Upon making a Facebook post about what he had encountered, the man explained that he was attacked by white people in the community. After finding the courage to approach these people about what he had seen and how it made him feel as a Black man, he was responded to with anger and defense that they were simply Halloween decorations. Following this, the owners of the home with the decorations hung two additional figures that depicted the lynching. Because of the claimed decorations and resistance associated with removing them, the man who had experienced this expressed feeling unsafe in his community. Community members have expressed concerns about the lack of police involvement, which further reinforced feelings of vulnerability and lack of trust. In fact, the reported response of police when contacted was that they could not do anything because these figures were on private property (Jones, 2019, November 6). However, in the twenty-first century, one must ask, what type of obvious hate crimes, injustices, and acts of violence get their boundaries justified by law enforcement? This news article highlights that from 1882 to 1968, over 70 per cent of lynchings in the United States were of Black people (Jones, 2019, November 6). Further, they provide an example of a lynching that occurred in 1896 in Bear River, Nova Scotia, of a ‘coloured man’ who was wrongfully executed for the death of a white girl (Jones, 2019, November 6). Jones also provides several other examples of anti-Black racist acts in Nova Scotia within the last ten years, and often when addressed, the victims are usually met with threats of violence.

To expand on the argument that racist laws still exist in this province, the most recent evidence we have is the report on street checks in Halifax, which found that Black people are six

times more likely than whites to be stopped (Wortley, 2019). Moreover, understanding the racist ideals that have formed these laws, and the racist perceptions that have been explored in the literature (Couttreau-Robins, 2014; Este & Bernard, 2003; Whitfield, 2004; Williams, 2013), we can identify that many of the practices, such as street checking, were in fact illegal (Quon & McSheffrey, Global News, 2019). Alarming are the comments associated with the news articles covering these social injustices that are cloaked in anti-Black racism. For example, in response to a story produced by The Canadian Press someone asked, “should the [B]lack community not apologize for the crimes committed by the [B]lack community?” The Canadian government observed that the overrepresentation of Black people in the criminal justice system is because Black people are both victims of crime and are accused of, or convicted of a crime (Department of Justice Canada, 2022).

Williams (2013) eloquently summarizes a comparison of these laws to those of Jim Crow in the United States. In the cases of Viola Desmond’s arrest; the “driving while Black” racial profiling of professional boxer, Kirk Johnson; and the so-called race riots in 1991, which claimed the excessive use of force by police (Tutton, 2019, November 29), ANSs have been victimized over and over because of their Blackness. Williams (2013) explains that the ideals behind enslavement for white people have been justified by an ideology of white supremacy; the corresponding belief being that Blacks were inherently inferior, which was the same ideology that linked Blackness with criminality. Both ideologies reflect a dehumanizing view of African peoples based on the social construction of races as being different from one another.

This can be explored within the education system, as ANS learners are subjected to multi-layered experiences of racism, discrimination, and school-site violence as early as daycare (Pimentel et al., 2023). Scholars (Dei et al., 1996; James et al., 2010; Finlayson, 2015; Goodman,

2018; Maynard, 2017) have also written about the “school to prison pipeline” metaphor, which suggests that negative school environments and experiences can lead to poor achievement and school dropouts, subsequently increasing their risk of incarceration in the future. Individual Program Plans (IPPs) are another avenue to limit one’s educational and economic opportunities, putting them at greater risk for crime. There is an overrepresentation of ANS learners on IPPs, with these students being 1.4 times more likely than non-ANS learners to be put on a plan for at least one subject (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016). This perpetuates the socioeconomic divide between Blacks and non-Blacks in this province.

It can be argued that “education is where we find the most significant manifestation of colour prejudice in Canadian history” (BLAC, 1994, p. 4). One of the most prominent reports on the experiences of ANS learners was the Black Learners Advisory Council Research Report on Education (BLAC, 1994). This comprehensive community-informed report presented several concerns within the educational system that negatively impact ANS learners. BLAC’s vision in creating the Report, within seven years of its submission, was an education system that would be equitable, accessible, and inclusive for all learners. According to BLAC, both academic and cultural excellence for ANS students would be a reality with the total school environment, including the academic content, reflecting sensitivity to ANS students. The report stressed the importance of developing positive self-concept and self-esteem among Black learners, noting that as a child’s ability to succeed in life grows when their self-esteem increases.

Systemic and social issues such as racial discrimination, overt or subtle, have played a major part in the denial of equal opportunities to education for people of African descent in North America. As a result, from birth, most African Canadian children are trapped in a vicious

cycle of societal rejection and isolation, poverty, low expectations, and low educational achievement (BLAC, 1994). From the numerous findings that the BLAC Report on Education identified, 30 recommendations were brought forward for implementation within eight years after its presentation, “Academic excellence cannot be reached without cultural excellence” (National Alliance of Black School Educators as cited in BLAC Report, 1989, p. 17). The overall recommendations stressed the necessity of the participation of the Black community in the decision-making, planning, and delivery of educational services.

The many forms of injustice, racism, discrimination, and injury that ANSs have endured for over four hundred years in this province has, inevitably, impacted the health and wellness of members of this community. Research has identified that ANSs are at greater risk for certain chronic illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure (Este & Bernard, 2003; Etowa et al., 2007; James et al., 2010; Waldron, 2014), for example, and other mental health issues (Este & Bernard, 2003). The history of marginalization and oppression, in addition to the systemic barriers to social and economic resources and power, has had a devastating impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of African Canadian people (Bernard & Bernard, 2002). In a 2013 study, James and Lloyd found that African Canadians in Halifax, compared to Calgary and Toronto, experienced the greatest levels of racism-related stress.

Unequal regard as humans led to unequal access economically, which placed Black people at a lower socio-economic class with fewer adequate resources available to them. Further, due to repeated abuse from authorities, not only at the hands of the law but also within healthcare, with Black bodies subject to unethical, uninformed, and non-consensual experimentation, trust in these serving professions was often broken. This fear and lack of trust

has continued to hold true in the underrepresentation of Black people accessing perceived help (Beagan et al., 2012; DeGruy, 2005; Este & Bernard, 2003).

Theme 2: Anti-Black racism as a trauma and source of excessive stress in North America

Anti-Black Racism. It is necessary to acknowledge and name the distinct and unique experiences of Black people, and how they have been subjected to discriminatory practices and exclusion in this country. Mullings et al. (2021) assert that Black people in Canada have endured violent practices and policies of anti-Black racism for centuries. The African Canadian Legal Clinic (ACLC) defines anti-Black racism as:

Prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-[B]lack racism in Canada is often subtle and is generally not accompanied by overt racial slurs or explicitly prohibitive legislation. However, it is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, such that anti-[B]lack racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society. Canadian Anti-[B]lack racism in its contemporary form continues the historical practices of racial segregation, economic disadvantage and social division. (Morgan and Bullen 2015 as cited in Mullings, Morgan, and Quelleng, 2016, p.23)

According to Black Health Alliance (2018), this term was first used by Dr. Akua Benjamin. She states that anti-Black racism is a “particular form of systemic and structural racism in Canadian society, which historically has been perpetuated against Blacks” (Benjamin, 2003 as cited in Mullings et al., 2021, p. 9).

The declaration of anti-Black racism by the United Nations in 2017 recognizes that African Canadians have faced inequities as a direct result of a deep-rooted legacy of enslavement and colonization (Mullings et al., 2021). Anti-Black racism is “sustained through multipronged laws, policies and practices that have enforced segregation and discrimination in education, housing, employment and other social institutions (Mullings et al., 2021, pp. 8- 9). Further, Mullings, et al. (2016) assert that:

anti-Black racism is manifested in the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians in society through a lack of opportunities, lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. (p. 23)

Mullings et al. (2021) make a clear distinction between racism and anti-Black racism, with anti-Black racism being “the implications of harm and racial trauma inflicted upon people of African descent as a result of ideologies and practices developed to oppress them in the colonial era and the present day” (p. 9).

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome Expanded. An emerging area of research in the social sciences and humanities is the exploration of the psychological and socioeconomic implications of intergenerational and cultural trauma with people of African descent. Heavily focused on the African American experiences, scholars (Alexander, 2001; Alexander et al., 2004; DeGruy, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2012) have written about the residual effects of slavery. Many have recounted the history of slavery in America and the laws created thereafter that have contributed to the exclusion and dehumanization of Black people.

DeGruy (2005) has centred her work around the manifestations of a Black population's experiences of multigenerational trauma, resulting from centuries of enslavement and the continuation of oppression and institutionalized racism. She has developed PTSS, which is both a theory and condition. According to DeGruy, in addition to the endurance of trauma resulting from racism, there is also a belief by some African Americans that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them. Broken down, she describes it as **M + A= P**:

Multigenerational trauma together with continued oppression and **A**bsence of opportunity to access the benefits available in the society leads to **P**ost Traumatic Slave Syndrome. Using the characteristics of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as defined in *The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*, DeGruy (2005) provides examples of how enslaved Africans would have experienced PTSD criteria. Further, she argues that intergenerationally, this same criterion can be met by descendants of those enslaved because of sustained racist societies. She identifies three additional categories of pattern PTSS behaviour:

1. Vacant Esteem: “the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, elaborated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority” (p. 125);
2. Ever Present Anger: “a reaction to our hopes and dreams being continuously undermined by the institutions which govern us and the racism the permeates American society” (p. 133); and
3. Racist Socialization: “the adoption of the slave master's value system [...] the belief that everything white, and all this associated with whiteness, are superior; and that Black, and all things associated with Blackness are inferior. (p.134)

DeGruy provides compelling present-day examples relevant to African American culture to support each of these categories.

Grills et al. (2016) have also discussed the lie of Black inferiority in their work. They elaborate on how this lie is the root cause of the dehumanization of people of African ancestry. The authors also explain that with the lie of Black inferiority comes the lie of white superiority and the damaging effects of the psychological, cultural and historical trauma. Cross (2003) also talks about myths of Black history being a form of violence against Black culture and Black people.

Similarly, researchers (Carlson et al., 2018; Grills et al., 2016; Halloran, 2018; Hartowicz, 2018; Sharpe, 2015; Spencer & Perlow, 2018; Sule et al., 2017; Wilkins et al., 2012) have taken a historical perspective to expand on theories such as PTSS. These researchers argue PTSS to be a seminal formulation in understanding the state of the African American community and examining the ways in which African Americans have typically responded to racism, and further navigated a racist society.

Analyzing the manifestations of PTSS from a healthcare lens, Carlson et al. (2018), Sule et al. (2017), and Halloran (2019) have considered the health implications on African Americans. For example, Carlson et al. (2018) found that the healthcare of veterans of colour has been compromised because PTSS; they are not receiving adequate healthcare services and are at risk of developing varying mental illnesses. Sule et al. (2017) discuss the importance of healthcare providers being informed of PTSS to combat the revictimization of Black people in their healthcare and treatment. Sule et al. (2017) reference the misdiagnosis of schizophrenia in Black males and under diagnoses of affective disorders such as depression and anxiety. As well, they note that Black men are often denied equitable and accessible healthcare services when their

struggles are ignored which contributes to the marked propensity for anger, hopelessness, feeling a sense of their lives out of control, and frustration, that DeGruy (2005) has identified.

Through a Terror Management Theory (TMT) analysis, Halloran (2019) identified the poor social and psychological well-being of African Americans, drawing on a model of cultural trauma to explain the experiences and effects of PTSS. Terror Management Theory (TMT) acknowledges one's cultural worldview as protective against anxiety. When left unchecked, anxiety can negatively influence one's physical, psychological, and social health. He argues that unstable and insecure African American cultural meanings, identity, and values are elements of cultural trauma experienced by African Americans during the era of enslavement and have also been transmitted to the current generation. Thus, PTSS is related to one's current general state of poor health. Expanding on PTSS, Halloran (2019) argues that TMT provides a robust account of the relationship between PTSS, prejudice, and the negative health and welfare of African Americans.

Other writers (Sharpe, 2015; Spencer & Perlow, 2018) have sought to apply PTSS to alternative contexts, such as within the justice field. Sharpe's (2015) study recognized the implications of race-related trauma for African American victims and survivors of homicide. She applied PTSS to analyze and build upon the way that these survivors cope and the heightened risk of health concerns because of the accumulated stress associated with such an experience. In addition, Spencer and Perlow (2018) take the focus off the African American victims and put the responsibility on the perpetrators of racial violence, in this case, white men. In other words, it calls for accountability of white men and how they might be affected when their privilege, power, and dominance of white supremacy is taken away. Spencer and Perlow (2018) have theorized the effects of Post Traumatic Slave Master Syndrome (PTSMS), arguing that white

men in authority have exercised their control and power of Black women for centuries. They provide case examples of women in the 1900s who were lynched after speaking up for themselves when falsely accused of criminal claims:

PTSMS illustrates the pattern of white vengeance, retaliation and domination, and the savage means that were utilized to silence Black women's voices, control any form of perceived resistance, and utilize fear and coercion to solidify control and establish and sustain racial and gendered power relations. (Spencer & Perlow, 2018, p.166)

They argue and provide evidence through their cases that Black women's rightful resistance is often met with violence and at times, death. Spencer and Perlow (2018) offer two more recent high profiled cases of Black women's resistance: Korryn Gaines and Sandra Bland. Both Korryn and Sandra were shot and killed by the police, which Spencer and Perlow refer to as "neo-lynching". They find similarities with how Black women have been policed over time and how they continue to be met with violence as a response to their rightful resistance.

Race-based trauma. Scholars (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005) define Race-Based Trauma as the personal exposure of an individual to racism that causes emotional stress, physical harm, and/or fear: "These assaults can be verbal attacks, physical attacks, or threats to livelihood, but because they are racially motivated, they strike the core of one's selfhood" (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005, p. 480). When Race-Based Trauma is experienced, individuals can be so overwhelmed by the situation that they are unable to employ effective coping strategies and may experience negative symptomology (Bryant-Davis, 2007). Reports of negative symptomology including depression (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002), increased alcohol consumption, poor self-concept, health complications, and decreased self-esteem may be made (Verkuyten, 1998). Further, there is research demonstrating associations between

emotional responses to racism-related experiences of mothers and lower birth weights of their infants (Carty et al., 2011).

Carter's (2007) work on "race-based traumatic stress injury" is another categorization of the impact and effects that racist incidents can result in. He considers this to be "non-pathological" constellations of emotional reactions to racism stress (p. 88), and the reactions are potentially comparable to those that characterize PTSD. What differs is that the catalysts for such reactions are individuals' subjective experiences of events or incidents, even if observers such as clinicians and researchers, for example, or perpetrators do not perceive the same events as traumatic.

Helms, Nicolas, and Green (2012) agree with the American Psychological Association (2000) that "racism and ethnoviolence may function as traumatic catalysts themselves even when there is no recent evidence of threat to life, and either may serve as exacerbating stressors in the types of commonly referenced traumatic situations" (p.66). Claims have been made that "exposure to race-related trauma, in and of itself, may be the primary etiological factor in the development of an adjustment or stress disorder" (Scurfield & Mackey, 2001, p. 28). Additionally, Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) assert that the effects of racist incidents on survivors are traumatic and can be comparable to the effect that both rape and domestic violence have on those who are victimized. Similarly, physical and psychological assaults of racism that would be acknowledged in the fore mentioned situations might be overlooked if racism is not considered to be an important cause of physical and emotional distress.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005) present an important argument that racist incidents, unlike other forms of trauma, are determined by others who hold some type of power such as researchers, service providers, the perpetrators, or colluders in the racism or ethnoviolence,

rather than the person who experienced the racial violence themselves. This experience is paralleled through an example of an earthquake occurring: “its magnitude can be assessed and there is general agreement that it has occurred; however, racial and ethnovoilent traumatic events have no such consensually agreed on criteria” (p. 67). They present that the basis of the impact of racism is not due to a specific form; racist incidents are at minimum, a form of emotional abuse and, therefore, can be traumatic.

Influences of cultural trauma on collective identity. Outlining various times and eras in history, both Eyerman (2001) and DeGruy (2005) provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of pivotal impactful events that have occurred in relation to the African American experience. Cultural trauma can be understood as collective traumas resulting from selective processes of historical remembering and forgetting of collective memory. Alexander et al. (2004) argues that if such trauma is successfully represented and mediated as a threat to the whole group, it is enough to remember it, even if the trauma itself occurred hundreds of years ago. He discusses the centrality of slavery as a collective trauma in the formation of an African American identity, with analogies between mid–nineteenth century bondage and ongoing racial discrimination making slavery a potent symbol and rallying cry for struggle. They provide examples that support their rationale for such claims of traumatic experiences. We can come to realize how acts and laws over time such as the Civil War; the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation; reconstruction; the first and second world wars; Black Codes and Exclusionary acts; The Peonage of sharecropping; the Convict Lease System; Jim Crowe and Civil rights movements; and affirmative action policies, for example, have contributed to the Black identity and perpetuated the manifestations of PTSS. Scholars (Este & Bernard, 2003; Pachai, 1989; Walker, 1979; Williams, 2013) have also done this in the Nova Scotian context, demonstrating the

argument of racist attitude and beliefs that white settlers from the United colonies brought with them.

DeGruy (2005) discusses the current state of the African American community and the continued perpetuations of racial violence and injury because of enslavement. To ensure their sustained health and wellness for future generations, she calls for healing through the exploration and understanding of the role that history has played on African Americans' well-being.

Although Canadian literature does not explicitly state that ANSs experience collective trauma as defined by Eyerman (2001), it is evident that there is an understanding in Canadian Literature of the collective experience of racism as harmful and negatively impactful on the health and well-being of peoples of African descent in North America in general. The literature also supports a call for more scholars to explore this area of research.

Individual and collective responses to race-related trauma. Common in all the literature I reviewed is a call for healing. The literature gives suggestions for African Americans to engage in collective and individual healing from the lie of Black inferiority and PTSS. It also provides a framework in which the greater society, including those who are non-African American, can consider their allyship as well as a general acknowledgment and empathic understanding of what has happened to people of African descent in North America.

While there has not been much application of PTSS in Canadian literature, researchers (Este & Bernard, 2003; Este & Bernard, 2005; Beagan, Etowa & Bernard, 2011; James et al., 2011) have explored the effects of racism, race-related stress, and coping strategies in the African Canadian context as outlined above. Research centered around African Canadian experiences and the ANS experiences have sought to understand the ways in which we cope with such stress and discrimination. Noteworthy, are the studies that examine coping responses and

survival strategies on the accounts of Black men and women (Este & Bernard, 2005; James et al., 2011). There has been a common theme of resiliency within this population in the ANS context (Beagan, Etowa & Bernard, 2011; Munroe-Anderson, 2018; Parris & Brigham, 2010).

An intergenerational gendered analysis of coping and responses to race-related stress. There have been studies (Beagan, Etowa, & Bernard, 2011; Este & Bernard, 2003; Este & Bernard, 2005; James et al., 2011; Ruck, 1997) that examined the coping strategies for ANS-identifying women and men of varying ages. It has been found that spirituality, specifically in the communities of African descent, has played a major role in coping, healing, survival, and perseverance (BLAC, 1994; Este & Bernard, 2003; 2006). Ruck's (1997) study on high school students' responses to race-related stress explored the ways in which ANS male and female students coped with racism. This ethno-methodological, 12 participant study explored the responses to racism, their perception of the effect of such incidents, and the outcome of addressing the racism incident. The study results revealed that significantly more students employed problem-focused strategies and their responses to racism produced beneficial results. The results included action on behalf of school staff and their peers to deal with racist incidents, reduction in the impact of the racial offense, and suspended discriminatory treatment. However, these actions were mostly temporary, resulting in short-term changes. Students found their ability to cope with incidents satisfying and indicated that self-beliefs and social supports were invaluable coping resources and essential in dealing with racial incidents. Ruck's study identified slight differences in the ways that female and male students responded to such incidents. To handle both overt and subtle racism, female students were more likely to respond with problem-based strategies or active coping mechanisms, such as planning, suppressing of competing activities, initiating an action, or seeking social support. Male students were more likely to

respond with emotional-based strategies or passive coping mechanisms, such as seeking emotional support, avoidance, minimization, and denial. However, both male and female student participants used a combination of problem and emotion-based coping strategies in incidents of overt racism. Further, with overt incidents of racism, male students more frequently initiated a direct response, while females often enlisted the social support of others. Males reported more satisfaction with the outcome of overt racist incidents than females, while the reverse was true in subtle incidents (Ruck, 1997).

Writers such as Bernard and Este (2005), Essed (1991), Bernard (2004: 2009), James et al. (2010), Este and Bernard (2003), and Bernard and Hamilton-Hinch (2015) discuss survival for people of African descent in a society where racism exists. Bernard and Este's (2005) study which explored the intersectionality of race and gender with Black men examined their perspectives on strategies of resistance and resilience. Their findings suggested that the notion of survival was a key concept in articulating one's navigation in society as a Black man. As quoted by one of their participants,

“Survival means being able to wake up every day, going out and trying to make it, without letting the stress of racism and racial pressure get you down [...] part of surviving is dealing with racism every day of your life with your dignity intact.” (Bernard & Este, 2005, p.448)

Another participant explained survival as “not to be suppressed by all the negative connotations that society imposes on black men... surviving means reclaiming the ability to be self-sufficient and claiming a structure that will enable black people to have a voice” (Bernard & Este, 2005, p. 448). Hamilton-Hinch (2015) also identifies surviving as “the storyline” (p. 99) of

her research study with ANS women. She asserts that “surviving is about remembering the past in order to live in the present and to understand and anticipate a different future” (p. 99).

In addition, it was identified that positive racial identity is a contributor to resiliency. Bernard (2009) also emphasizes the importance of racial identity through history: “Our major source of strength is embracing our African roots, history, and culture... it is important to know our history [...] if we don’t know our history it is difficult to plan our future” (p. 448). Furthermore, Bernard (2009, 2004) and Boudreau (2015) exemplify the sense of pride that study participants found in their racial identity, which helped them to fight and resist the racism around them.

Equally important to racial identity, identified in Bernard and Este (2005), Bernard (2009), and Boudreau (2015) as a factor in the development of resiliency, was the presence of positive role models and mentors. For the men in Bernard and Este’s (2005) study, family and community played a significant role in the development of their resiliency. Bernard (2000) notes in particular the contributions that Black mothers make to the survival of their sons.

Considering the experiences of ANS women, Began, Etowa, and Bernard (2012) argued that spirituality was a primary source of coping for 50 mid-life participants. Issues of racism, stress, and mental illness were explored with spirituality and spiritual practices, such as church and having a personal relationship with God, serving as a race-related coping strategy for participants. The findings revealed that spirituality aided these women in their understanding of racism and other life challenges with the ability to recast or redirect these challenges.

Este and Bernard (2003) explain that experiences of exclusion fostered the emergence and development of a distinctive Black culture, which helped to sustain the strength and tenacity

of ANS community members. This was required to survive and make meaningful contributions in a hostile and demeaning environment. Boudreau (2015) found that participation in culturally specific community-driven (CSCD) programs also played a significant role in building resiliency. In this qualitative study, participants identified various CSCD programs that left a positive impact on their lives. It was found that participation in such programs and initiatives fostered many improvements such as: sense of self and identity; self-esteem and confidence; sense of belonging; academic achievement success; individual growth; mentorship and role models; giving back and engaging in leadership; and health and well-being. In terms of the impact on mental health and wellness, participants attributed their ability to responsibly respond to and cope with racism and race-related stress to these programs.

Effective culturally responsive interventions and recommendations. Interestingly, all the literature reviewed brought forward recommendations, suggestions, models, and interventions that have been effective in scholars' areas of work and research. It is essential that when problems are presented within research, potential solutions or actions that can be taken to aid in resolving problems or promoting better management can be offered. Fascinating was the number of success stories in the examples offered, such as the grass-root organizing of Emotional Emancipation Circles (Grills, Aird, & Rowe, 2016) to challenge the lie of Black inferiority and therefore, reconstruct the narrative. This reconstruction would foster a firm sense of self-esteem, promoting freedom of ideas from the lie of Black inferiority, and the healing from the historical trauma of enslavement and ongoing assaults to the humanity of Black people and their civil and human rights. Similarly, Calson et al. (2018) have also built their race-based and trauma interventions for veterans of colour on a collective or group model. By providing psychoeducation, they are informing their clients of not only the mental health effects of war

service but also the intersectionality of race, war, and mental health, with racism as a contributor to excess and accumulated stress.

Both Hartowicz (2018) and Sharpe (2015) have created models of interventions based on their research findings, which draw upon ancestral understanding, history conceptualization, and relational support. These models would benefit from further research to analyze the effectiveness of such. Additionally, Williams (2013) welcomes considerations of the Mi'Kmaq Legal Support Network, which she refers to as a useful existing model for such a community led approach as she proposes for ANS restorative justice. DeGruy (2005) calls for collective healing, suggesting that African American people build upon their strengths such as sense of community, faith, spirituality, and our tradition of great leaders. There is also an invitation for us to look at ourselves in the mirror to consider making better our character as a way of improving our life.

Although scholars have yet to discover a challenge to the reality and validity of PTSS or cultural and race-related trauma, one would guess that there are researchers who might challenge the evidence of such trauma. Alexander et al. (2004) affirm that “many groups, along with some social scientists who study them, consider the idea that collective identities and experiences are socially constructed repulsive” (p. 69). There has certainly been a need to develop scholarships in this area to mitigate a research gap over many years. Often, it is those who live with the experiences of cultural trauma that recognize it as an area that has been left out of research; in particular, discussions around the traditional understandings of trauma. Scholars (Brandell & Ringel, 2019; Nakazawa, 2015; Van der Klok, 2000; 2003; 2014) have studied trauma as an individual experience rather than collective. Such studies have led to an understanding that trauma directly impacts the individual who has endured the trauma, such as their mental health and well-being. Van der Klok (2004) writes that the study of the traumatic origins of emotional

distress started during the last decades of the 19th century. Alexander et al. (2004) assert that events do not in themselves create collective trauma, given that people may experience substantial disruptions without becoming traumatized. Instead, it considers “human capacity to identify with others, imagine what they have been through, and mediate such identifications and experiences” (p. 69).

As DeGruy (2005) has noted, enslaved Africans would have met many, if not all, of the PTSD diagnostic criteria. Van der Klok (2004) writes that “traumatized individuals need to have experiences that directly contradict the emotional helplessness and physical paralysis that accompany traumatic experiences” (p.19). He has identified characteristics crucial for inclusion for treatment such as safety, anxiety management, and emotional processing. If we understand trauma as being also a cultural experience based on traumatizing events that have occurred in present time but also the passing down of such effects because of them not being addressed or treated because of racism and exclusion, then we can conclude that unresolved trauma is transferred generationally.

Adverse Childhood Experiences. Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) have become increasingly known in the realm of understanding and addressing trauma and its implications into adulthood. The Philadelphia Urban ACEs Survey recognized gaps found within the Kaiser Study, led by Felitti and Anda (1998), on the initial Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) survey. The Philadelphia Urban ACEs Survey (The Research and Evaluation Group, 2018) discovered additional instances of adversity that people of racialized and marginalized backgrounds might face, including witnessing violence; feelings of discrimination; adverse neighborhood experiences; bullying; and living in foster care.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refer to emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, and household dysfunction during childhood (Felitti & Anda, 1998). ACEs have become quite well known and studied in fields of medical and health sciences, psychology, social work, and education, since the monumental Kaiser study conducted by Felitti and Anda in the late 1990s, as referenced above. This ground-breaking study drew attention worldwide to the relationship between childhood adversity and adult health outcomes. Co-principal investigators, Robert Anda and Vincent Felitti, undertook the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) as a collaboration between the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente (Anda et al., 2005). The study was pivotal in exploring childhood adversity and adult health outcomes utilizing a questionnaire seeking to understand early childhood adversity. This was done through analysis of three types of abuse; emotional, physical, sexual; and exposures to household dysfunctions: substance abuse, mental illness, violent treatment of caregiver, criminal behavior, and separation or divorce (Anda et al., 2005). The findings of the study revealed that traumatic life experiences happened often and are linked to mental health disorders, physical health issues such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, liver disease, and more. These linking issues have been found to ultimately lead to early death in many cases (Nakazawa, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2014; The Research and Evaluation Group, 2013).

It was recognized that the data available on ACEs were not inclusive of a broad demographic of the general population. As well, there was a focus only on experiences within the home. In 2012, The Philadelphia Institute for Safe Families (ISF) in partnership with the Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC) developed and conducted a survey of childhood adversity exposures among Philadelphia residents. Known as the Philadelphia Urban ACE Survey, a total of 1,784 adults completed the survey, with a response rate of 67.1 per cent

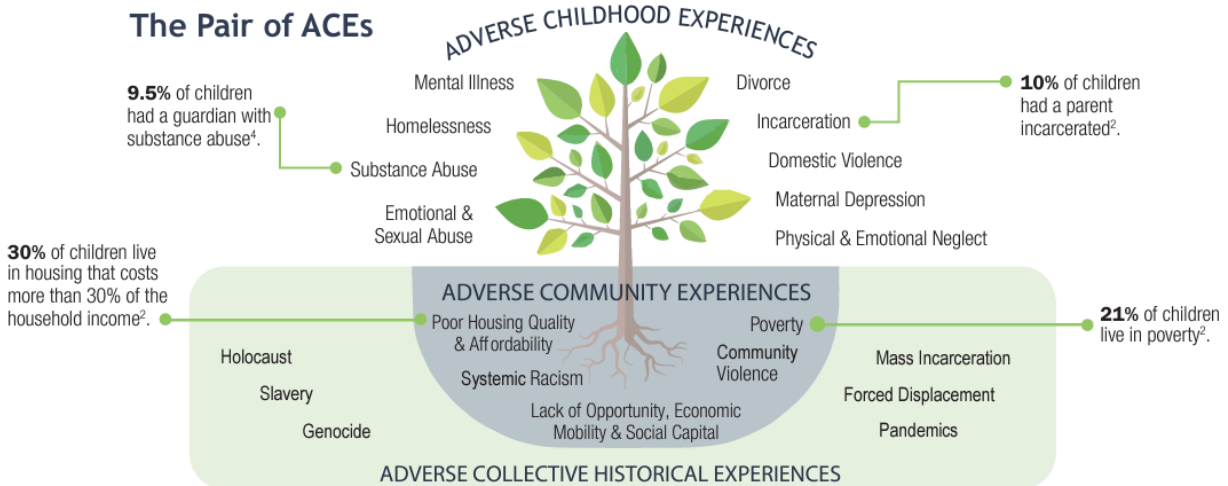
of participants having a higher prevalence of ACEs than found in previous studies (The Research and Evaluation Group, 2013). The research found that 33.2 per cent of Philadelphia adults experienced emotional abuse, and 35 per cent experienced physical abuse during their childhood. Approximately 35 per cent of adults grew up in a household with a substance-abusing member; 24.1 per cent lived in a household with someone who was mentally ill; and 12.9 per cent lived in a household with someone who served time or was sentenced to serve time in prison.

Additionally, expanding on experiences outside of the home and within the community, The Philadelphia Urban ACE Survey also examined the stressors that exist in the communities where people reside. They found that 40.5 per cent of Philadelphia adults witnessed violence while growing up, including seeing or hearing someone being beaten, stabbed, or shot. Over one-third (34.5 per cent) of adults reported experiencing discrimination based on their race or ethnicity, while almost three in ten adults (27.3 per cent) reported having felt unsafe in their neighborhoods or not trusting their neighbours during childhood (The Research and Evaluation Group, 2013). Over 37 per cent of Philadelphia respondents reported four or more ACEs. The research and evaluation team concluded from the findings of this study that there is a need for services that address the unique environmental stressors experienced in urban neighbourhoods to mitigate their impact on individuals and prevent ACEs. Scholars (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005; Butts, 2002; Carter, 2007; Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 2001; Helms et al., 2012; Scurfield & Mackey, 2001) have argued the need for the recognition of racism and ethno-violence, both overt and subtle, as ACEs and potentially trauma-inducing experiences.

As examination of the ACEs continues to be developed, scholars have begun to observe the prevalence and impact of ACEs on families.

Figure 1

The Pair of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)



Note. The Pair of ACEs tree metaphorically looks at the interconnectedness of ACEs within the family environment and adverse community environments: “the soil in which families’ lives are rooted” (Davis, et al., 2018, p. 2).

Heldreth et al. (2016) also found a correlation between childhood experiences of racism, and postpartum depressive symptoms one month after childbirth for African American women. The racism was found to be experienced both directly, as well as vicariously when directed at family members or close others. Schmitt et al. (2014) reveal through a meta-analysis of 328 studies, involving a total of 144,246 participants, that there are significant links between perceived racism and lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. With that, they found higher depression, anxiety, and psychological distress among African American men and women, even in longitudinal studies that controlled for initial levels of well-being. Saleem et al. (2022) write that trauma is indeed more prevalent among youth of colour, generally reporting greater exposure compared to White youth. Specifically, higher rates of trauma exposure for youth include “racial trauma, dangerous or frightening race-based events, stressors, or discrimination”

(p. 2). They discuss the challenges to identifying racial trauma in young populations due to “clinician lack of awareness, clinician bias and discomfort surrounding racial topics, and the narrow and exclusive scope of the diagnostic and statistical manual” (p.2). Though racial trauma and PTSD may have similarities, and can lead to a PTSD diagnosis, racial trauma is distinct due to ongoing collective and individual injuries from exposure and re-exposure to racial stress, which can collectively become traumatic (Comas-Díaz et al. 2019 as cited in Saleem, 2022). Applying a racial trauma diagnosis with youth is complex however, necessary to adequately address and respond to the needs of these youth and ultimately “change one’s trajectory of well-being and help to close racial disparity gaps in health and education in adulthood” (p. 14)

Noteworthy, Thurston et al. (2018) found that the non-white children and youth in their study in the United States experience community level adversity variables such as exposure to racism or violence more than the conventional household variables. Further, experiencing racism had the strongest negative effect of all ACE variables explored in this study, particularly for Black non-Hispanic children. Additionally, Black non-Hispanic children were the highest group to witness violence in their neighbourhoods. There was an evident association between community-level ACEs and emotional regulation.

Overall, this comprehensive literature review has provided a rich synopsis of the most relevant findings on cultural trauma and PTSS to date. With the foundational work of DeGruy (2005) in the formulation of PTSS as an analysis of the many manifestations of the residual effects of racism, there is now a foundational collective understanding of how the psyche of people of African descent has been and continues to be impacted. More recent studies have identified discrimination as one of the ACEs, which has led to the framing of a condition that Black people in America are living with. Building on PTSS, there are several scholars who have

expanded and sought to understand it in varying contexts such as healthcare and justice. There is a clear gap in the literature about the African Canadian experience, and specifically the Indigenous ANS experience. Given the significant history of enslavement and anti-Black racism in this province, alongside the continued systemic and institutional oppression, there is a need to explore the effects of race-related trauma on the overall well-being of Indigenous ANS people.

Theoretical Framework

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome Theory. Building from Merriam's (2009) idea that the potential for a research topic can come from the literature of previous research or theory in an area, DeGruy's (2005) PTSS theory will contribute to the forming of my theoretical framework for this study. PTSS theory states that:

African Americans sustained traumatic injury as a direct result of slavery and continue to be injured by traumas caused by the larger society's policies of inequality, racism, and oppression. Another aspect of the injury occurred as the result of the destruction of the African culture [belief systems, customs, and values]. (Leary, 2001, p. 39)

Leary (2001), now known as DeGruy, argues that the separation and interruption of relationship, which is the foundation of African historical survival, threatened their primary axiological construct or value system, causing unmeasurable mental, emotional, and physical damage. Further, considering the institution of chattel slavery, Africans were forced to integrate the ethnic ideology of their captors which Leary (2001) believes has led to 'cultural dissonance', a "feeling of disharmony and psychological conflict resulting in a loss of identity and self-esteem (p. 39). Thus, they would have learned to function within a system that differed from their traditional customs, values, and needs, and I argue that this continues to be an intergenerational challenge in present day.

Leary (2001) has also formulated post-traumatic slave syndrome as a condition (DeGruy, 2005), described in more detail in the literature review. As a condition, PTSS is inextricably linked to the “social-psychological-environmental factors of oppression, racism, and other stressors of human design” (p. 40). Additionally, she argues that although the direct trauma of slavery occurred centuries ago, perhaps too long ago to warrant diagnosing current African Americans with PTSD, PTSS theory proposes that residual stress-related effects were passed along through generations, occurring on several levels including family, community, and societal.

Outlining identified symptoms of PTSD as listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Revised Edition-IV (DSM-IV, 1994), Leary (2001) compares these to what enslaved Africans would have endured. She argues that PTSS theory could explain self-destructive behaviours among this group. Relating this reality to present day, Leary (2001) claims that the African American community is made up of individuals and families who collectively share “differential anxiety and adaptive survival behaviors resulting from prior generations of African Americans who suffered from PTSD” (p. 42). As a result, the community serves to reinforce both the positive and negative behaviours through the socialization process.

DeGruy’s (2005) work has predominantly focused on the African American population as descendants of enslaved African people, who were settled in the United States resulting from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Missing from the dialogue has been the inclusion of African Canadians; in particular, ANSs. Historians and researchers have uncovered the linkages and lineages of enslaved Africans brought to the United States to Indigenous ANSs (Couttreau-Robins, 2014; Whitfield, 2004; Williams, 2013). This direct correlation would support the

argument that ANSs may also be impacted by the residual effects of enslavement, and therefore, live with PTSS.

Africentric Theory. Asante (1991) examines the necessity for and nature of incorporating an Africentric approach: the centralizing of African American students and supporting them to see themselves in education, and the capacity of this to impact African Americans, specifically, those who are already politically and economically marginalized. He argues that:

education is a social phenomenon whose ultimate purpose is to socialize the learners to send a child to school is to prepare that child to become part of a social group. Secondly, schools are reflective of the societies that develop them (i.e. a white supremacist dominated society will develop a White supremacist educational system). (p.170)

Asante (1988) argues that Africentricity encompasses the belief in the centrality of Africans in postmodern history and both centralizes and normalizes the narratives of people of African descent within the context of community, taking into account historically rooted ways of being and knowing (as cited in Lynn, 2005). An Africentric approach incorporates a more holistic understanding of people of African descent. Este and Bernard (2003) explain that the core principles of Africentric theory and practice are rooted in:

Viewing individual problems holistically and as rooted in family, community and social structures; promoting individual and collective consciousness raising; recognizing a collective consciousness; critically analyze the intersecting nature and the lived reality of oppression; focusing empowerment on both individuals and the collective, building on

strengths; seeking social change and transformation. (Este & Bernard, 2003; cited in Njiwaji, 2012, p. 9 & 10)

Additionally, Schiele (1997) writes that one aim of Afrocentric social work is to empower historically oppressed communities by supporting their self-help efforts. Also, Schiele (1997) seeks to institutionalize a group's values and its political interests by establishing organizations, controlled by that group, that speak to and integrate those values and that promote that group's interests.

Scholars in the social work field have applied this theory within their practice. Mullings et al. (2021) write in *Africentric Social Work* that there is not enough attention paid to Africentric Social Work in Canada. African Canadian social workers continue to challenge the Eurocentric way of being and knowing with Africentricity. Scholars argue the importance of challenging Eurocentric social work theories and practice through research to inform inclusive policies and processes; for example, Mullings et al. (2021) state that “Africentric social work enables people of African descent to reclaim and recentre their cultural identities” (p. 10). They acknowledge that anti-Black racist beliefs, attitudes, and practices of Canada’s first social workers have enacted “violence upon Indigenous, Black and racialized peoples” (p. 10), and that Africentric social work practices in Canada are necessary in the “resistance, survival, thriving and culturally safe systems of care needed” (pp. 10 - 11) in this nation. This book affirms the need to reclaim power, hope, and healing for African Canadian social workers, who will in turn, advance our communities through empowerment and holistic liberation. Bernard (in Mullings et al., 2021) writes that the establishment of the only Africentric Perspectives in Social Work course in

Canada, which has been taught at the Dalhousie School of Social Work since 1999, has been a form of social action.

Scholars concur that there is a lack of awareness and misinformation of what Africentric social work is and how it can be used in practice beyond working with people of African descent. Further, anti-Black racism serves as a systemic barrier to validating other worldviews, theories, and ways of being.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory is a relevant contribution to the theoretical framing of this study. According to Lynn (2005), critical race theory frames and contextualizes the historically situated narratives of racially subjected people. There is a need to recognize the impact of race on society and its political dimensions in a global and historical context. Delgado and Stefancic (1991) explain that the critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. Explicitly related to my study, highlighting anti-Black racism, critical race theory calls for an analysis of race, anti-racism, and the processes of racialization. Noteworthy is the recognition of racism as an ideology that is passed along formally through various avenues, such as personal discourse, the media, and education, and informally through socialization. Razack and Jeffery (2002) specifically name concerns that in educational institutions and programs, including social work, core analyses of race have been cloaked under the rhetoric of anti-oppression, diversity, cross-cultural approaches, and multiculturalism, which is problematic. Critical race theory argues that race needs to stand alone and not be infused with other forms of oppression. Race needs to be addressed as a singled-out form of oppression that requires analysis of the social constructs of race and how this impacts racialized groups. Again, aligned with my personal and professional values as a researcher, according to Delgado and Stefancic (1991), this

theory contains an activist dimension that not only strives to understand our social situation, but makes efforts to change it and transform our society for the better. Razack and Jeffery (2002) also speak to the recognition of power and privilege as a tenet of critical race theory. They say it is critical to understand how privilege, power, and white supremacy continue to be created, maintained, and sustained in society. Additionally, critical race theory seeks to challenge the dominant ideology within society (Solorzano & Yozzo, 2001) and disrupt, through counternarrative, the narratives that the majority tell on race (Blaisdell, 2021, p.2). Critical race theory's central tenet is using "the unique voice of people of color to understand racism" (p. 2) through counternarratives. Within education specifically, it counters the "traditional claims the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (p. 473). Solorzano and Yozzo (2001) describe their use of critical race theory and the method of counter-storytelling with two graduate students. They assert that critical race theory in education recognizes that the experiential knowledge of racialized students is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education.

This literature review chapter expanded on the growing literature supporting the impact of anti-Black racism trauma on the life quality of Black people in North America. It highlights the minimal ANS studies that have explored the implications of racism individually and collectively through a thorough review of historical literature and research that has examined coping responses to anti-Black racism specifically. Finally, the theoretical framework guiding this study was outlined. In the next chapter, the methodology of this study will be described.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I provide an overview of my ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives; and describe the study's methodology. I will share the context of storytelling in the ANS community and how qualitative research, critical race theory, Africentric theory, and the use of narrative approaches to participatory research methods and approaches are suitable for racialized and marginalized communities. Additionally, I explain how arts-based research can be beneficial when conducting research, while outlining the process of DST and my specific study design. Finally, I will present the limitations of this study, including the method of DST, along with the research recruitment and ongoing consent process; data collection and analysis; timeline and trustworthiness of the study; and ethical considerations.

Research Statement and Questions

As I noted in the previous chapter, my primary research question of this study is: What are the Indigenous ANSs' experiences of race-related trauma and how have these experiences impacted their overall well-being and quality of life? I sought to explore the co-researchers' coping strategies, individual and collective resilience, and individual and collective healing practices.

Locating myself in the research. Positioning one's self as researcher in the research helps readers understand the reasons the researcher engages in a particular research area and the biases and subjectivities of the researcher. Mills (1959) reminds us that as students, the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community "do not split their work from their lives" (p. 195).

The lifelong learnings that influence and shape us simultaneously stem from our lived realities and contribute to them. As a young, middle class, ANS, able-bodied, cis-gender,

heterosexual, Christian, English (first language) speaking, educated, and employed woman, amongst other identity markers, I hold both privilege and oppression in my social location. Reflecting on Guba and Lincoln's (2005) Basic Beliefs of Alternative Inquiry Paradigm table 8.1 (p. 168), I consider my ontology and epistemology to be that of critical, constructivism, and participatory paradigm. I believe that for an individual shift to occur, major societal change needs to also occur, and vice versa. I also align my beliefs with de-colonizing approaches to research.

I believe it to be important that the research I conduct contributes to a knowledge gap in relation to ANS people. This belief comes from my values, deep connection to my community, and an awareness of the need for more research that centres ANS experiences. As a person who has experienced anti-Black racism explicitly and implicitly, individually and collectively, from my childhood to adulthood, I am aware of and have felt the effects of oppression.

I vividly remember an experience of racism when I was five years old in my school classroom. As a bright and attentive child, completing my homework and school tasks was never a challenge. I came to the classroom each day prepared to share what I had learned and completed the previous night for homework, which was the expectation. There were times when our classrooms would be combined, due to a teacher's absence for example, and this day my class was being taught by a different teacher than my own. Whenever a question was asked about something I knew, I raised my hand, prepared and quite excited to answer. However, I was overlooked. I remember looking around the classroom to see how many other hands were raised and there were only a few. I remember the teacher looking above and around me and my hand as if I were invisible. This was something that I clearly had an emotional response to, in addition to a logical one. Why wasn't I picked? One might argue that I can't be picked every time or that I

raised my hand last. I considered these possibilities. However, when it happened continuously, I began to challenge those thoughts more critically and as I grew older and wiser, and reflected on such encounters, I began to identify what may have been happening. My experiences like this one when I was five years old had an impact on my early years and have continued into my adulthood. This early experience also prepared me for other experiences in my educational journey, such as being expected to speak on behalf of all Black people and spontaneously teach not only my peers, but also the teacher about the specifics of Black history and ANS culture.

Helping people understand their experiences and identifying ways to find peace in these experiences has always been a passion, and what I would call a gift of mine. Fighting for equity, social justice, and social movements have also fueled this passion which led me to study Social Work as a profession. Completing both a Bachelor and Master of Social Work provided me an opportunity to give back to my community as a counsellor, educator, researcher, and academic. My master's thesis explored the impacts of culturally specific community-driven programs on the life journey of ANSs. I found, through this study, that these programs do indeed have positive impacts on the life journey of ANS participants in a magnitude of ways such as sense of self and identity; self-esteem and confidence; sense of belonging; academic achievement success; individual growth; mentorship and role models; giving back and engaging in leadership; and health and well-being (Boudreau, 2015).

As a community member and social worker, I have had the sacred role of keeping horrific stories of race-related trauma in confidence. Having this dual role creates an opportunity for me to be confided in personally and professionally. Additionally, many stories are shared with me as a way of coping, with no intention of taking further action. I recognize it takes courage for people to share stories. Some are fearful that people may accuse them of 'playing the race card'

or additionally, the possible negative consequences of challenging discriminatory actions, such as employment termination or receiving poor grades in school. I have seen the impact and effect of such experiences on the holistic well-being of ANS people. Hence, I argue that there is a great need for a deeper awareness of the effects of racial trauma in the ANS community and there is a need to increase and normalize opportunities for dialogue about this. My study invited participants to explore and acknowledge these experiences in an intentional way through sharing and the creating of their digital stories.

Reflecting on my experiences of anti-Black racism as an individual and as part of a community, there is no question that they have left an impact on my holistic well-being and continue to test my resilience. This testing can happen through the exhaustion that dealing with daily racism can cause a person of African descent. It can also come with the burden of the label of being resilient, as something that is placed on Black people, often with no actions or strategies to enhance the quality of life for Black people. Testing resilience can also come from the daily battle of choosing how to respond to racism and discrimination, as well as choosing how to cope with the effects.

After reading DeGruy's (2001; 2005) work and undertaking a comprehensive study of post traumatic slave syndrome as both a theory and condition, I have a better understanding of the complexities of how I have viewed and navigated the world; the ways in which I attempt to protect myself subconsciously and consciously; and the internalization process that happens daily. Much of this has been learned from my foremothers and forefathers. I acknowledge that these are not always consciously recognized or healthy means of coping; rather, they have been learned as a means of survival in many cases. Before this new learning, experiences of race-related trauma were acknowledged as normal; although not right or fair, they were expected. My

understanding was that these problems were for me to individually deal with, or for Black people to deal with and bounce back from because ‘that is just the way things are’. However, I now must ask, at what cost? I now challenge this simplified and internalized thought and contest it. I ask: is there recognition of the traumatic implications that these experiences of anti-Black racism and community level adversities can or have had on our overall well-being and life quality? Are our ideas of resilience inclusive of our healing, as opposed to our mere survival? How can we give ourselves permission to put our energy into individual, familial, and collective healing, and help others to engage also? Finally, what can DST contribute to the call for healing through the accumulative experiences of anti-Black racism trauma? These questions were explored through the research question and sub-questions that guide this study.

Through the following chapters of this dissertation, I share a deeper understanding of the traumatic implications of anti-Black racist trauma on the quality of life of people of African descent in North America. Further, the findings unpack the specific experiences that Indigenous ANS co-researchers have named through the qualitative research methodology of DST. This research seeks to create more awareness of the accumulative experiences of racism of Black people in this province and how systemic anti-Black racism is a daily reality for these co-researchers. The findings and analysis of this study demonstrate the need to explore and examine further, the validity of lived experiences of anti-Black racism trauma and how they can impact one’s quality of life. The DST process and digital stories themselves prove to be a unique, appropriate, and enjoyable method for the co-researchers in this study.

This study takes a qualitative research approach. A basic qualitative study focuses on meaning, understanding, and process with a purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009). Further, “qualitative research, as a set of practices, embraces within its own multiple disciplinary

histories, constant tensions and contradictions over the project itself including its methods and the forms its findings and interpretations take” (p. 8). She explains that there are various ways that researchers have categorized the umbrella term of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) specifically identified five specific approaches to qualitative researching, including narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) name six different research strategies including case study, ethnography, grounded theory, life and narrative approaches, participatory research, and clinical research. With the various approaches and methods to qualitative research to choose from, there has been consensus on how to classify such methodology (Creswell, 2007).

Merriam (2009) explains that basic qualitative research is about interpretation and the construction of meaning, and “understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p.22). She goes on to say that a researcher interested in conducting a basic qualitative study would be looking at the following: “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23) with an overall purpose to comprehend how people make sense of their lives and experiences. Additionally, Merriam (2009) explains five other categories of popular approaches, which include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, and critical qualitative research. Narrative analysis has been named by scholars, Jonassen and Hernandez-Serrano (2002), as “the oldest and most natural form of sense making” (p. 66 as cited in Merriam, 2009). This approach involves using the stories that people tell as data. Narrative approaches have become increasingly popular in recent years with life histories and narrative inquiry being named as two favoured approaches. Critical narrative seeks “to not just study and understand society but rather to critique and change society” (Patton, 2002, p.131). Merriam (2009) asserts that critical

research can be paired with other qualitative methodologies such as those mentioned above.

Critical research can also be applied under the lens of critical race theory and serves as a house of various types of research categories, such as participatory action research.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the qualitative researcher as a “bricoleur”, a maker of quilts (p. 6). They explain that there are many types of “bricoleurs including interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political and methodological” (p.5) Qualitative researchers stress the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, which is often a distinguishing feature of such research family.

Methodological Considerations

In numerous studies involving the exploration and examination of PTSS and its emerging developments, researchers have used similar methodological approaches. In all qualitative studies, threads of both narrative and arts-based inquiries have been used. Scholars (Alexander, 2001; Goodman, 2018; Halloran, 2019; Hartowicz, 2018) have drawn upon art media to either analyze data or collect data for analysis. Alexander (2001) and Halloran (2019) have both examined the ways that the mass media, music, and print messages as cultural artifacts have over time shaped African American identity. Hartowicz (2018) invited her participants to engage in an arts-based practice and analyzed and interpreted their art through her own art as she responded to theirs. Carlson et al. (2018) and Hartowicz (2018) have drawn upon narrative approaches through their collection of stories from participants facilitated by guiding questions.

Other researchers such as Wilkins et al. (2013) and Danzer (2012) have used case vignettes and studies as a methodological approach. Wilkins et al., (2012) discuss the importance of those approaches in therapeutic or helping roles to do their own healing work. Danzer (2012) presents ways in which non-Black clinicians can effectively and culturally responsively work

with African Americans, which is an essential contribution to this body of work. It has been found that there is an underutilization of therapeutic services among African Americans (Brown, 2003; Neighbors, 1998; Wilkins et. al, 2012). Additionally, Wilkins et al. (2012) note how African Americans are at times wary about participating in therapy due to the perception of inferiority that has been a reality for over 400 years in North America. Awosan et al. (2011) make the point that there is often a lack of cultural understanding among clinicians that deters African Americans from seeking therapy. Part of navigating this is to understand what Danzer (2012) names trauma of white racism: the naming of white racism as trauma. He argues that this can take trauma therapies in a culturally specific direction.

Story Telling Traditions in African Nova Scotian Communities

Everybody is a story. When I was a child, people sat around kitchen tables and told their stories. We don't do that so much anymore. Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way the wisdom gets passed along. The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering. (Remen, 2006, p. xxxvii)

There has been a long-standing legacy of oral story telling within the ANS communities, with oral story telling being central to knowledge translation. Throughout history, stories have been used to educate members of the community, and the greater community, about our cultural ways of knowing and doing. Although often left out of history or misrepresented in a multitude of ways, creating our own narratives has served as evidence that we have been here and contributed to this society like any other group. In fact, we know now the narratives that have been left out of our learnings and lessons of history in the educational system, for example. These stories provide evidence that our economy has been built much to the credit of people of

African descent in this province as enslaved and freed people (Cottreau-Robins, 2014; Whitfield, 2004).

As a young girl, I recall my grandparents' stories from "back in the day". As they narrated their memories, I would envision what they were sharing by placing myself there. I remember stories that my mother and grandmother would share about blueberry picking in the country fields of East Preston, and the stories my father and grandfather would share about riding on the back of pick-up trucks to the farms just outside of the town of Truro. These were joyful memories accompanied by laughter and smiles. However, they also told stories of hurt and pain, coated in racism and discrimination such as my grandfather spoiling his clothes as a child due to having to walk a distance to the basement of his elementary school to use the "coloured only" washroom. These are the stories that make me think about the potentially traumatic effects of anti-Black racist practices.

These stories of racism and discrimination, and of survival and resilience, were shared repeatedly with me when I was presented the opportunity to work as a summer student on a research project within the ANS communities of Truro. Truro is a town located in central Nova Scotia, Canada. It is the home of three small historic ANS communities, one in which I am from (see Appendix A: ANS Community map). This job gave my research partner and I the opportunity to listen to and record the narratives of members of this population about their lived experiences living in this town. This brief research study conducted with elders in the community captured their stories of combatting racism and discrimination in the town, but also celebrating their resilience. The stories that we collected and the sharing of memories that we were able to facilitate through this work was a significant contribution to our place as people of African descent in that town. Their stories were woven together, and we developed a beautiful

arts-based collection of direct quotes from participants, along with generic words and phrases that described the narratives as a final product. This was displayed on a poster which included some photos of community members and was showcased in the workplace office. Although this research project was not necessarily a formal research project in respect to ethics processes and an in-depth ethical consideration of data collection and analysis, consent was obtained from participants and their information was kept confidential as much as possible. Although not naming the type of methodology used for this study, telling stories orally, with photos, and through other artistic media has always been an interest of mine.

Participatory Research

Mullings et al. (2021) highlight the decolonization work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), who argues that research is a colonial tool that has reconstructed anything other than Euro-Western knowledge as being ‘other’. Decolonizing research is a process of uprooting and challenging colonialism within Western research, such as through integrating Africentric worldviews and perspectives for and by people of African descent (Mullings et al., 2021). It is critical that research be conducted with ANSs by ANSs.

Participatory research and action research are methodological approaches that are gaining increasing importance within qualitative research (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Bergold and Thomas (2012) stress that participatory research methods are about planning and conducting the research process with the people whose “life-world and meaningful actions are under study” (n.p). Participatory action research has been a favoured approach when conducting research within marginalized communities. Scholars (e.g. Blair & Minkler, 2009) explain that this method is unique in that it positions participants and academics as co-researchers in the research process.

According to Baum, MacDougall, and Smith (2006), PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. PAR is a collaborative and democratic approach to research which seeks to improve the circumstances of participants through generating positive social change (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Florczak, 2016; Lac & Fine, 2018). Further, PAR aims to empower participants through questioning their circumstances and deepening their knowledge about the social, political, and economic factors shaping their lives (Udas, 1998).

The participatory research process enables co-researchers to step back cognitively from familiar routines, forms of interaction, and power relationships to fundamentally question and rethink established interpretations of situations and strategies (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Researchers (Fine et al., 2004; Torre, 2005) explain that PAR can “represent the intergenerational work between individuals who cut across race, ethnicity, gender, class, or even sexual identity” (p. 565 as cited in Lac, 2018); and can lead to community action to effect social change (Cahill et al., 2010).

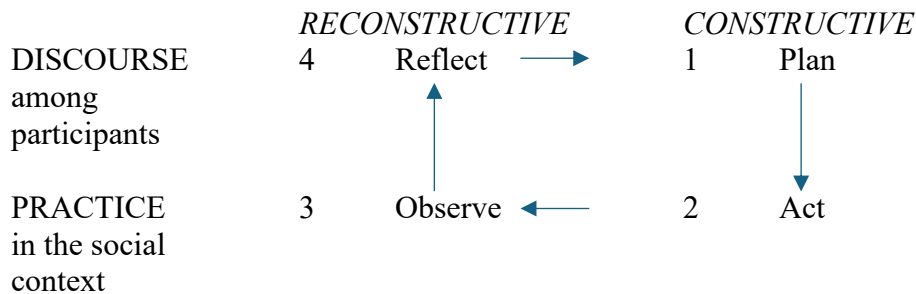
PAR ensures collective participant engagement in collectively building knowledge through a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Lac (in Lac & Fine, 2018) explains the importance of dialogue, talking through thinking, exposure to critical texts, and self-reflection, which were cornerstones to their specific PAR project. Explorations of personal circumstances and their broader social contexts are core to the PAR process (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Dudgeon et al., 2017).

Participatory research involves a focus on collaborative research activities (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). The fundamental guiding principle for this research approach is that all participants are partners in the research process. Carr and Kemmis (1986) see the PAR process,

in its integration of critically reflective practices, as a continuous movement between discourse and action (Figure 2).

Figure 2

“The Moments of Action Research”



Note. The Moments of Action Research [recreated] (Carr & Kemmis, 1986)

Bergold and Thomas (2012) present fundamental principles of participatory research which are: the need for “safe space”, how community is defined, and different degrees of participation.

Critical PAR has several approaches to draw from when conducting a research study. Influenced by the work of Freire, researchers use PAR to encourage oppressed communities to analyze structural reasons for their oppression. PAR requires researchers to work with communities to lead to action for change. Collective and self-reflective inquiry are central to this method. Research partners or participants are invited to deepen their understanding of the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. Reflective processing is “linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships” (Baum et al.,2005, p. 854). Additionally, Gaffney (2008) describes the acronym developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) as:

Planning a change, Acting and observing the process and consequence of change, Reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then replanning, acting and observing, reflecting, and so on ... (p. 595 as cited in Gaffney, 2008, p. 10)

This method can include individual interviews, focus groups, personal journaling, and other creative activities that can also be incorporated. Training in research methods and group processes is provided to support community members in their co-researcher roles (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Moreno-John et al., 2007).

The following section will present this study's method. Research participants, referred to as co-researchers, engaged in a qualitative, narrative, and critical research process through DST to address my research questions.

Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling (DST) as a participatory research methodology is the best method to answer my research questions. In line with arts-based methodologies, as well as participatory and narrative in the sense of storytelling, I believed this to be both an appropriate choice and an innovative selection, which I explain in this section.

As an arts-based methodology, DST, which is a participatory and storytelling approach, brings the stories of participants to life through technology. Like photovoice, which is an arts-based method that uses photos to tell a story through a community-centred participatory action lens (Fakhari, et al., 2023; Wang & Burris, 1994), DST is a facilitated visual approach to research. With an in-depth look into the studies that currently exist around this phenomenon, it is evident where gaps exist as referenced above with the need for exploration within the ANS community. Examining the people who are descendants of those people of African descent, who

made the extended journey to Nova Scotia from around the world to unfulfilled promises, has contributed to an understanding of the intergenerational effects and impact of cultural trauma on descendants of enslaved Africans in North America.

“Storytelling is an ancient concept. Digital technology is a modern concept. Together, they provide a future for stories to live on forever” (Hardwick, 2015, p. 133). With technology becoming more and more prevalent in the ways in which we source and present information, storytelling too, has begun to take different forms, moving from oral and written to digital formats. Lang et al. (2019) assert that at no other point in history has the ‘kitchen table’ had so many voices. Stories can now quickly and substantially influence the world. With this shift, researchers have also turned their attention to employing digital tools in therapeutic, pedagogic, and knowledge-generating ways (Haigh & Hardy, 2011; Laing et al., 2017a, 2017b; Rossiter & Garcia, 2010 as cited in Lang et al., 2019).

Considering the creativity that participatory research methods and approaches encourage, as well as the innate creative beings that people of African descent are, it is appropriate to explore this blend. According to Lambert (2013) and Lang et al. (2019), DST is a methodology that guides participants in the creation of short movies, in which they may use their own photos and videos, that tell the story of their experiences. Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) explain that DST is a process that allows participants to embark in a guided creative workshop, inclusive of digital technology and participatory approaches, to tell their own stories in their own words as a co-producer. As a participatory method, DST presents numerous qualities that offer a space for dialogue and community building (Gubrium et al., 2014). DST is “co-creative media” (Spurgeon et al., 2009, p. 275) that adapts to different contexts shaped by the reflexive, recursive, and pragmatic requirements of action research. Hartley and McWilliam (2003), cited by Spurgeon et

al. (2009, p. 276), explain it most simply as “a workshop-based practice in which people are taught to use digital media to create short audio-visual stories, usually about their own lives”.

Lang et al. (2019) describe the process of DST as one that includes “unique facilitation components, skills, and techniques that help participants create meaningful DST about their life” (p. 2). The final product of this DST process is a short, two to ten (Robin 2016; Lang et al., 2019) minute long “mini-movie” that uses images, videos, a voiceover, and various video editing techniques to share an important story from a participant’s experience. The origins of DST date back to 1995, with a National Film Board of Canada short film, “City of Gold”, written by Pierre Burton (Daly, Koenig, & Low, 1957; Tibbetts, 1995 as cited in Lang et. al, 2019). This film used various video techniques to create a sense of movement in still photographs while the narrator told the story. Although not yet a mainstream technique then, still photographs were popularized through the documentary films of Ken Burns (Tibbetts, 1995 as cited in Lang et al., 2019). The StoryCentre in Berkley, California, used DST to facilitate workshops with people to visually illustrate stories of their lives using personal photographs (Gubrium et al, 2014; Woletz, 2008 as cited in Lang et al., 2019). The concept of voice is central to DST.

A DST method invites participants to construct narratives, choose images, and select music or sound they feel best represents their experiences, and they are guided through hands-on computer editing tutorials (Gubrium et al, 2014, p. e-1). Additional researchers have explained that the audio-visual clips include imagery built on recordings of workshop participants’ voices reading the stories they have written (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018.) The clips are the product of a series of creative writing activities that aim to help co-researchers find the gift of their voices; one of the seven elements that Lambert (2013) identified. As part of the DST process, participants are also supported in transforming their story into an audio-visual clip that can be

shared with the immediate group and disseminated further if they choose (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018).

DST is described as bridging the gap between theory and experience. Identified as both a social practice and a research method, it reflects on personal truths that are worked on by sharing through technologies and participants listening to each other's stories with the opportunity to provide comments and feedback within the group. Additionally, it invites co-researchers to engage in writing practices. This process can be described as "co-constructing" (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018). Richa Nagar (2013) frames storytelling and co-authorship at the point where academia intersects with political activism, as "it allows co-authors from multiple locations to draw upon and scrutinize their multiple—sometimes conflicting experiences and truths" (cited in Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018, p. 4).

Gubrium et al., (2014) affirm that DST has multiple aims: to empower participants through personal reflection, growth, and the development of new literacies; to educate and raise awareness among viewing audiences about issues presented in the stories; to inform public policy, advocacy, and movement building; and to provide visual, narrative, and multisensory data to support public health research and evaluation efforts (p. e1). It can be identified as the intersection of academia and social activism (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018).

Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) assert that participatory research seeks to empower research participants in being co-creators within the research process.. It aims to challenge the power dynamics that are at play in a research process to create a more equitable process for all involved, like the values of Africentric theory and critical race theory. According to Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) and Gubrium et al., (2013), DST strives to give power back to co-researchers by emphasizing ownership of their digital stories, as well as determining where the

digital stories are shared beyond the group. Additionally, dynamics are altered simply by researchers playing a co-authoring and co-production role in the DST process.

Gubrium et al. (2014) affirm that DST has multiple aims, including empowering participants through personal reflection. Reflection is critical to the narrative family of methodologies. Although DST is within the participatory research umbrella, it fosters elements of narrative research through its storytelling approach. Dewey's theory of experience, often referenced in narrative research, draws attention to the principles of continuity, where experiences build on each other and the interaction of these experiences occurs between people in encounters. We can understand narrative research to be a form of qualitative research that serves as a tool or method for analysis to understand the ways that people create meaning in their lives through the collection of stories and narratives (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connolly, 2007; Elliott, 2005). Gubrium et al. (2014) assert that a DST method invites participants to co-construct narratives that they feel best represent their experiences using multi-media. According to Fryrear and Corbit (1992), the very act of looking for and selecting photos of the co-researchers' choice can enhance reflection and connection to important life events (as cited in Lang et al., 2019). Co-researcher, Sylvia spoke to the appreciation for reflection, as referenced in the findings chapter

Understanding that historically, racialized communities have been researched on as opposed to with, Vacchelli and Pevrefitte (2018) argue that the process of DST even further encourages those traditionally known as the researched to have and take an active role in the research process, which ultimately eliminates the researcher-researched identification. As had been identified by PAR researchers (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Moreno-John et al., 2007), DST participants are trained to develop their own stories in a collaborative

process, setting this approach aside from those with more traditional forms of in-depth interviewing. However, I would argue that the researcher-researched identification is perhaps lessened as opposed to eliminated because of the inability to completely eradicate the power dynamics of the researcher role, such as the responsibility of developing the research questions and leading the research process, for example.

Gubrium et al. (2014) have identified DST as a culture-centred approach in health communication. They explain that digital stories are “intrinsically linked with cultural identity, thereby creating meaning, belonging, and guidance through shared understandings (p.e3)”. Interestingly, they link DST with the culture-centred approach used in Indigenous research methodology because it “is a way to link individual stories and community narratives, while inciting and eliciting dialogue between and among diverse peoples and groups” (p. e3). Additionally, Briant et al. (2016) found that DST was a culturally relevant research approach for working with a group of Hispanics/Latinos of Mexican origin. They found DST to be a powerful way to communicate their experiences, connect with community, and present the potential for disease prevention and awareness.

Recognizing research as an advocacy tool, DST also has an important place in public health advocacy. In 1999, Amy Hill led the CDS Silence Speaks initiative, which positions DST as a tool for promoting gender equality, women’s health, and human rights (Gubrium, Hill, & Flicker, 2014). Benmayor (2008) calls DST a hybrid, multimedia narrative form that enables critical and creative theorizing. She argues that it is an assets-based social pedagogy that constructs a safe and empowering space for cross-cultural collaboration and learning (as cited in Gubrium et al., 2014).

DST workshops are often facilitated in a two-to-three-day workshop and are organized around key principles or phases. The description of the “story circle”, with the imagery referring to sharing stories in the inclusive and intimate spaces created by people telling personal stories while sitting in a circle, is intriguing (Hartley & McWilliam, 2009). Others have described the DST process as three phases with the first being introductory: where facilitators share examples and present brief lectures on core elements; the second phase: focused on script drafting or the story circle, this is a group process for sharing and receiving input on story ideas or scripts with supports provided to participants as needed; and the third and final phase: engaging in the mechanics of story production. Facilitators lead tutorials on basic digital editing, with participants subsequently audio recording their voiceovers and using software to piece their stories together. With consent, digital stories are screened at the end of the workshop to storytellers and facilitators (Gubrium et al., 2014). Hardwick (2015) reminds us that it is important to remember that “it is not the platform, quality, framing or focus of the shot; rather, it is the character, the real-life human being, the story, the impact to the community that is the focus” (p. 133). Additionally, Lang et al. (2019) categorize the DST process into four phases: finding the story, telling the story, crafting the story, and sharing the story. Within their study, which was with health care patients, the first session was the discovery and telling phase where the researcher worked with the participant to find and write or tell the story; the second and third sessions involved crafting the story using editing techniques; and lastly, the fourth session was about sharing and digital dissemination, which facilitated DST through a screening experience, where family and friends, health care professionals, or other patients and families viewed the story.

Lang et al. (2019) claim that listening deeply and following leads are key tasks of DST. It is the foundation from which understanding occurs (Moules et al., 2015). The DST facilitator is an active participant and should be willing to contribute their own experiences and imagination to the process. The facilitator and participant, together in conversation, decide what pieces of the story resonate and which leads to explore in the story-writing process. Frank (1997) emphasized this mutuality as thinking “with” a story versus thinking “about” a story (as cited in Lang et al., 2019). Finding the story theme is essential to DST as it identifies the meaning of the story. Lang et al. (2019) have described the story theme as central to finding other memorable pieces of the story connected to that theme to represent a lifetime. Effective facilitation of finding the story in DST requires practice with open-ended questions, meaningful back-and-forth conversation between facilitator and participant, and curiosity.

Telling the story requires the DST facilitator to help participants choose how and what to tell of their story. Lang et al. (2019) suggest three potential ways that this can be done: (a) follow classical story structure and principles such as Freytag’s five phases, called Freytag’s Pyramid (1995), which consist of exposition (ending with the inciting incident), rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution; (b) emphasize subtext and imagery, which allows the audience to come to their own interpretations of stories; and (c) address external, internal, and philosophical conflicts which explores the deeper meaning of human experience. It is in this phase that facilitators help participants succinctly but powerfully communicate the lesson embedded in their stories, using only 300 to 500 words.

Finally, crafting the story is about creation, expression, and exploring the emotion involved with telling a story. This can be done through the selection, editing, and transitioning; cropping, movement, and overlays; and pacing, timing, and music, for example. Lastly, showing

the story is the final piece to the DST process. It is through the sharing component that participants may understand how important their story really is. As shared by Lang et al. (2019), debriefing a screening experience with the participant is an important final step.

According to Laing et al. (2017a; 2019), there are many ways to structure DST programs, including working one-to-one with participants over a number of sessions, with a particular software program, to create the movie, group workshops over a number of days (Davis, 2004; Lamber, 2013 as cited in Lang et al., 2019), or giving participants time to take devices such as iPads and work independently (Sitter, 2017). It has been found that if all four phases that Lang et al. (2019) describe of the DST process are completed, the format of a DST program can be modified to meet the unique needs and goals of each health care setting.

Robin and McNeil (2012) present the ADDIE model which can be followed throughout the entire DST process.

Figure 3

ADDIE Model

A	Analyze	Where are we going? Perform an instructional analysis
D	Design	How will we get there? Design an instructional strategy
D	Develop	Develop instructional materials
I	Implement	Implement Instruction
E	Evaluate	Did we get there? Conduct evaluation

Note. This model has been used to assist in developing digital stories in research. (Robin & McNeil, 2012, p. 39)

This model has guiding questions that can be considered through each phase of the process. These guiding questions are quite helpful, outlining each of the phases in more detail for DST facilitators or educators in teaching participants DST. This might serve as a tool for aiding in crafting the story.

Acknowledging that DST as a participatory approach, challenges the power dynamics within research, there is a belief that co-researchers or research participants hold their own distinct power in their domain of life and work, which is negotiated during the research encounter (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018). In social research, when the question of power imbalance arises, we as researchers must represent research participants' views and voices in our domain, occurring through data analysis and dissemination. Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) assert that representing participants' views and opinions is a delicate practice and comes with a high risk of colonizing peoples' experiences if their voices are not acknowledged and accounted for in an ethical manner. An auto-biographical approach, DST presents the merit to prioritize self-representation and the participant as knower. DST is not meant to result in objective representations of facts and events but rather, a glimpse into the inner emotional experience of the participant. The credibility of DST comes from the emotional authenticity of the story versus the objective details of events or experiences, and as such, opens a role for memory and imagination as legitimate informants into individual experience (Caine et al., 2016).

The Strengths and Limitations of DST

Participatory research has many strengths; particularly how it challenges power dynamics between the researcher and researched, combined with its activism and advocacy nature. As a

participatory approach, DST brings a fresh and new way of researching and engaging participants in the research process. Co-researchers are also co-producers in their own telling of their stories, which is one of the main strengths of DST. As Gubrium et al. (2014) state, DST aims to empower, educate, inform public policy, and ultimately transform on micro, meso, and macro levels. Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) affirm that DST provides an opportunity for co-researchers to self-represent and invites readers and audiences to bear witness to the first-hand experiences of diverse groups through digital media.

As with any methodology, DST has limitations. Gubrium et al. (2014) explain that the DST experience can be triggering for participants as they recollect and tell painful stories. While these types of stories are often very powerful, they can raise tensions around the ethics of naming perpetrators of violence. Therefore, it is important to ensure that participants do not remain victims of these experiences by providing appropriate support and care; for example, having on-hand elders, social workers, or other professionals who are trained to help with emotional work. Further, researchers should screen potential participants to exclude individuals who may still be experiencing their stories; particularly, survivors of traumatic experiences, and those who could be put at risk of further harm when constructing a coherent narrative about these experiences.

Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) also recognize that the traditional researcher has an inability to fully control the outcome of the story, which can represent both a strength and a weakness of DST as a qualitative research method. As a strength, it can be argued that it is truly participatory and empowering for co-researchers. The researcher serves as a facilitator who can control the process and attempt to guide the story but has very little control over the story's contents. Contrarily, with no control of story contents, this leaves room for the story to lack clear connection to the specific research questions posed by the traditional researcher. Hardwick

(2015) also mentioned digital exclusion as a potential area for consideration, acknowledging that there are still members of the general population who are without internet or technological resources.

Co-researchers

Having 6 co-researchers was appropriate for the research methodology of DST in responding to the research questions. Table #1 is the co-researchers' demographics.

Table #1 - Co-Researcher Profiles

Name	Age	Gender Identity	Community Grew Up In (urban or rural)	Education	Employment/Profession
Sylvia	65	Female	Rural ANS	Graduate Degree	CEO
Angee	51	Female	Rural ANS	Graduate Student	Author, Speaker, Poet
Chanae	33	Female	Urban ANS	Graduate Student	Management
Nicole	33	Female	Urban ANS	Graduate Student	Public Servant – Disability Management Advisor
LaMeia	32	Female	Urban ANS	Partial Undergraduate Degree	Executive Director (Art Industry)
Jermal	27	Male	Rural ANS	Undergraduate Degree	Special Advisor to the Minister of Health and Wellness

A gendered analysis was applied; however, not in great depths due to the fact there was one male identifying co-researcher. Similarly, an intergenerational analysis was used to interpret the findings across age and generations, with there being a mix of ages amongst co-researchers.

There is a respect for elders that heavily exists in the ANS community, which can be examined in the findings section.

Considering DST as a research methodology, Gubrium et al. (2014) and Lang et al. (2019) discuss the limitations of conducting a DST research project. There needs to be an acknowledgement that digital stories produced by co-researchers are not absolute truths, although the multi-media technologies involved in the method offer an opportunity for more multi-dimensional exploration of storytelling. Vacchelli and Peyrefite (2018) contend that digital stories:

Depict partial and inter-subjective truths which are a result of different layers of co-production: the researchers' agenda, the role of the DS external facilitator, the story circle and its multifaceted interpretations of the stories, the personal urge to produce a story rather than another, the role of the emotions that are mobilized in order to make the story palatable, and the discursive strategies that are enacted when the story is disseminated in the public sphere. (p.10)

Gubrium et al. (2014), however, note that while DST does have limitations, it does offer more authenticity in the telling of the story, as it is static in digital form, as opposed to ever-changing each time it could be told in oral form. This is why ongoing consent between the researcher, through email or verbal communication, and the co-researchers at various stages of the research implementation is important to this research process.

My Digital Storytelling Research Design: Digital Storytelling with African Nova Scotians.

Storytelling has long been a part of African culture and way of life. This is true for ANS history and culture as well (Brigham, 2013, 2021; Munroe-Anderson, 2018; Parris & Brigham, 2010). Oral telling and re-telling of stories and life experiences have been a way of communicating, teaching, and connecting amongst this population. It is through stories that

history is passed down, intergenerational wisdom is shared, and appreciation is gained for the ways that people of African descent have had to navigate a racist and oppressive society.

Storytelling in the ANS culture has been a relationship-based, participatory practice (Munroe-Anderson, 2018). Scholars (Dei & Howell Rutherford, 2023; Caine, 1016; Parris & Brigham, 2010) have written about storytelling with people of African descent and the role that all play in the storytelling process. I remember hearing stories from my grandparents about their upbringings in times of extreme, overt anti-Black racism. The re-telling arose emotions within me that were so strong, it was as though I was living in that time in history myself. I would ask many questions and listen very closely. Although the discussion centred around pain and sorrow of injustice, there was also humour. They would laugh off some of the pain, and I would understand why they did that. More questions, more answers, lots of unknowns. However, the essential message was about the importance of strength, resilience, resistance, and love all the time.

As described above, ANS people experience anti-Black racism daily. One could argue that these acts might present as traumatic to individuals and to the collective. It can also be concluded that because of the enslavement of African people, from whom ANSs descend, this population may live with PTSS. This study explored the phenomenon of experiences of anti-Black racism as traumatic, through the narratives and the life stories shared through the participatory research method of DST. Understanding the importance of participants as agents in the telling of their own stories makes DST an appropriate methodology that positions participants as co-constructors in each step of the research process. Stories are powerful and in a world of digitization, this methodology brings an element of innovation and empowerment to

participants, as well as those who might view the stories and relate based on their own lived experiences.

This research study provided ample opportunities for the research questions to be clearly stated and offered further explanation to co-researchers through one-on-one or group meetings conducted as part of the research process. These group workshops provided an opportunity for deep self-reflection that is necessary for DST through the preparation of sharing and crafting stories. The following activities were included as part of a DST design with ANSs: a three-part in person and virtual DST training and curation workshop, including the sharing and crafting of the story, and a screening of the digital stories that was as agreed upon by participants. One-on-one sessions were also offered to co-researchers as check-ins. As a researcher, I also used audio reflective journaling as an individual private debriefing process and took field notes as a source of data collection, which will be expanded further in the findings and discussion sections.

Recruitment Instruments

Gubrium et al. (2014) explain that there are a variety of ways that DST workshop recruitment can happen. Partnering with established groups or putting out a call for participants are some of the ways named in the literature, which is what I did. Additionally, I circulated recruitment posters via email and posted them on personal and community wide social media platforms. Word of mouth also served as a means of recruitment, given its effectiveness within the ANS community. Additionally, specific identified agencies were also directly emailed the poster and correspondence for circulation, such as the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers, Health Association of African Canadians, ANS Employment Lab, and individual stakeholders and community members.

Participants were offered a \$25 gift card for a store of their choice for their participation in this study.

Research Recruitment Process

Six study participants expressed interest in the study via e-mail. Subsequently, a phone call was held between me and the interested person, where an initial screening tool was utilized to determine their readiness for participation in the study, given the sensitive nature of the research topic which sought to explore experiences with racialized trauma. Their readiness was assessed using qualifying questions that aligned with the eligibility requirements of the target population sample. *Question #3* of the screening tool (Appendix D) confirmed interested participants' understanding of race-based trauma by providing a definition according to Bryant-Davis (2007) and Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005). This was followed by asking if they identify with having experienced it.

Noteworthy is that one of the six co-researchers was initially uncertain if they were ready to participate in the study, given the sensitive nature and potential risk for emotional distress or re-traumatization. It was important for me to offer appropriate time for this potential participant to determine their state of wellness and assess their capacity for involvement before deciding to participate. Informed consent outlining the risks and the ability to voluntarily withdraw without consequence was reiterated at different stages of the initial recruitment stages. Ultimately, that interested participant felt they could participate in the study.

The six co-researchers consisted of five women and one man. The age range of co-researchers was 20 to 65 years of age. All co-researchers were employed at the time and had some post-secondary education. All but one co-researcher currently lived in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM); however, three co-researchers grew up in rural areas outside of HRM. This

will be elaborated on more in the findings chapter. Co-researchers were given the choice to use a pseudonym or their real name for this study. All chose to use their own names.

All identify as members of the ANS community who have experienced racial trauma. Such experiences included, for example, incidents of racial profiling, racism driven employment or educational experiences, or other human right and institutional incidents of anti-Black racism. The participants engaged in the following activities: a three-part series, including two DST training and curation workshops; and a screening of the digital stories amongst the group.

Ongoing Consent Processes. Before the study began and at different times throughout, the co-researchers were asked to provide oral and written consent to participate in the study. At the study's beginning, participants were asked to sign an informed consent document to confirm their understanding of participation. Individual check-ins with co-researchers were additionally conducted throughout the duration of the study to ensure that they were still consenting to participate and that they were provided the information around voluntary study withdrawal. Informed consent was obtained orally at each of the three different stages of the research study. The informed consent stated that this research is for my doctoral dissertation and that I will use the data for peer-reviewed journal articles and presentations.

They were also informed that if they agreed, they would be required to sign another consent form if an opportunity arose for the digital stories to be shared beyond the purpose of this study. There was discussion of ongoing consensus during the digital story workshops where participants discussed together their hope or desire for sharing their digital stories, including with who (audience) and where (platform such as social media, website, in person event etc.) and beyond, such as through peer reviewed journals, conferences, and other academic related events and activities.

Co-researchers did provide consent to sharing the digital stories beyond the group; all participants consented to sharing them in a variety of ways. Co-researchers discussed the opportunity for digital stories to be shared within community and with specific organizations. As a group, we also discussed keeping each other in the know about where and when videos are being shown so that co-researchers are aware. We also discussed knowledge translation and creating opportunities for dialogue within the community.

Data Collection

Understanding that there is a growing need for literature exploring cultural trauma and trauma expanded as it relates to racialized groups, a definition of anti-Black racism was shared on the recruitment screening tool to help community members understand its meaning. To allow for clear and informed opportunities for co-researchers to engage in this research process, there was a series of activities designed for co-researcher engagement. Sitteret et al. (2020) reference Oliveira (2016) when describing participatory visual research as including “a range of strategies meant to facilitate participant-centered meaning making,” (p. 262), which involves individual participation as well as larger group processes (p. 2).

The opportunity to journal was offered as an ongoing activity that co-researchers might choose to engage in throughout the DST process, as both a self-reflective and debriefing activity. The participants’ journals could be in the form of paper, audio recording, or video clips, for example.

The DST workshop took place over three, two-hour group sessions, one of which was the sharing session plus one, one-on-one two-hour session. Part one of the two group sessions educated participants on the DST process and explored the sharing of their stories, focusing on experiences with racial trauma as it relates to the research question, as well as the finding of the

story as identified by Laing et al. (2019). This also included the screening of other digital stories that have been done as examples and are like our research topic. Peers were able to provide feedback to one another, particularly in finding and crafting their stories and unpacking concepts that arose. Participants thought about how their stories might roll out in a condensed digital version, including imagery, sound, music, and other effects. Sitter et al. (2020) compare DST to other participatory visual methods such as photovoice as discussed above, noting that both processes require participants to bring their individual stories and singular visual representations into a group setting and discuss their images around a shared topic.

Part two of the three group sessions offered training/education on the technologies that were used for developing the digital stories, such as *WeVideo*, an online video editor (WeVideo Inc, 2024) and the beginning of the story curation process, such as identifying desired photos, music, and exploring program effects. Participants brought with them photos and other artifacts that resonated with them and their experiences. Co-researchers were given the choice to work on their stories on their own or with my help. The one-on-one session consisted of the actual curation of the digital story if co-researchers required assistance, or as an opportunity for co-researchers to share their crafted digital stories with myself prior to any agreed upon larger sharing process.

As Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) have noted, co-researchers have a say in how their research data is disseminated. Co-researchers decided how they wanted to share their digital stories as a group during part two of DST workshop, which resulted in part three of the workshop series; the sharing session. They also agreed to sharing beyond the research group, such as at a virtual screening event open to only family and friends, or a public event with no exclusion criteria.

All digital stories included in this study were between one and a half to five minutes in length, aligning with the suggestions of Lang et al. (2019) for timing in creation, which suggests two to five minutes. Keeping in mind the research question, co-researchers were asked to develop their story how they so desired. The software, *WeVideo*, used to create the digital stories, embeds “top-shelf video editing tools, stock assets, and effects” (WeVideo Inc, 2024). From video templates to the ability to create one’s own video from a blank slate, *WeVideo*’s online video editor provides numerous free and paid tools for use. Co-researchers shared that they had a multitude of features and effects available to create the digital stories. Some of these included: multitrack editing, including video, text, and audio; uploading personalized photos into the online video editor; uploading images from the collection available on the website, or on the internet and uploading to the editor; audio effects including instrumentals available from the site, original audio clips, recording voice over, or narration features; animation features; and trimming and splitting (WeVideo Inc, 2024). One co-researcher even chose to pay for some of the features they chose as mentioned briefly above, to truly demonstrate what they wanted in their digital story. All digital stories were made with the individual co-researchers’ personal devices, and on their own time. Although I offered assistance, the co-researchers felt comfortable and confident to create their digital stories on their own.

Data Analysis

There were multiple sets of research data used in this study, including researcher field notes, audio recorded reflections, the DST three-part workshop, workshop transcripts, and the final completed digital stories. According to Boyatzis (1998):

thematic analysis is a way of seeing; a way of making sense out of seemingly unrelated material; a way of analyzing qualitative information; a way of systematically observing a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization, or a culture. (p.4)

Thematic analysis requires an encoding process which identifies explicit codes the researcher identified in the data. This could include a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms. A theme can be understood as a pattern found in the information that at the minimum, describes and organizes possible observations, or at the maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomena. A theme may be identified through direct observation in the information or a deeper understanding of what might be underlying the phenomenon. These themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research. This is a critical component of thematic analysis that seems fitting for this study, as PTSS theory and the research that has been conducted with such theory as a framework is essential to this study. Coffey and Atkinson say that “coding can be thought about as a way of relating our data to our ideas about these data” (cited in Boyatzis, 2013, p.4), whereas coding provides many benefits in the organization, processing, and analysis of qualitative information (cited in Boyatzis, 2013).

Boyatzis (2013) explains that thematic analysis requires competencies such as pattern recognition, openness, flexibility, planning, and systems thinking. Such a process of analysis includes four stages: sensing themes; doing it reliably; developing codes; and interpreting the information and themes in the context of a theory or conceptual framework” (p.11). Coding of data was done across data sets, such as researcher field notes, the DST three-part workshop and one-on-one session, and the final completed digital story.

Fish and Syed (2020) argue that DST projects can be analyzed using different qualitative analytic methods. DST projects can be analyzed with a phenomenological analytic approach that focuses on the meaning and lived experience of a particular psychological phenomenon or group (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007): “DST frames the method and approach to the project, but the analytic approach remains flexible and can be integrated with different research questions” (p. 15).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which included an encoding process that identifies explicit codes that the researcher has identified within the data such as themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related. These themes were initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research.

Ongoing data analysis took place, beginning with my field notes that included my observations of co-researchers' participation, such as their responses to prompts and questions, as well as their body language, emotions, tones, and interactions with others in the three-part DST workshop series; and were captured through audio recorded reflections, the DST three-part workshop, one-on-one sessions and check-ins, and the completed digital story. Data analysis occurred immediately and was ongoing throughout the data collection process, including the above-mentioned activities.

I chose to use NVivo for the coding of data. This software is described as “a place to organize, store, and analyze your data” (QSR International, 2021). NVivo assists researchers in conducting deeper analysis from many sources and defending their findings. Some of the key elements of NVivo include importing data from virtually any source; analyzing data with advanced management, query, and visualization tools; asking complex questions of your data to identify themes and draw clear conclusions; and achieving more robust research results in less

time (QSR International, 2021). It is ideal for dissertations, as it streamlines qualitative and mixed-methods analysis and literature reviews.

Timeline

Recruitment was done in October of 2023 and data collection took place between October and December of 2023. The co-researchers participated in the three-part DST training and curation workshop, one-on-one sessions, and a virtual screening event during November and December. Part one and two of the workshop series took place within a two-week period. Part three of the workshop, the one-one-one session, and the sharing session occurred the next week. I audio recorded my own thoughts and observations as a form of journaling. In this way, I documented my observations and initial thoughts after each interview and debriefed the process for myself, given the emotional and psychological heaviness of the phenomenon which I was exploring.

Trusting the study

Merriam (2009) discusses the importance of producing valid and reliable knowledge, especially for practitioners who intervene in people's lives. Trustworthiness is a key component to any research study. She discusses rigor as being essential to reliable and valid research. To ensure trustworthiness within my study, an in-depth well-informed literature review has been completed to underscore the research problem and the level of research that has been conducted around it. The literature review provided the context for such a study and supported the need to conduct such research.

According to Creswell (2007), there is criterion that differentiates “good” types of qualitative research from each other. They note that in a narrative study, good criterion “tells a persuasive story told in a literary way” (p. 215 as cited in Merriam, 2009). Triangulation has been a key component of the reliability of this study in terms of how the data is captured, analyzed, and conceptualized by the researcher. Participants had the opportunity to engage in “member checks” or “respondent validation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) to ensure that their information is being interpreted accurately.

By including a section on the location and positionality of the researcher, I make known my relation to the topic ensuring that I acknowledge my biases: “Data cannot speak for themselves; there is always an interpreter or a translator” (Ratcliffe, 1983, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 214).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics and credibility are interconnected in that they involve “intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence (Patton, 2002, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Patton (2002) has created an “Ethical Issues Checklist,” which identifies ten items for consideration: Explaining purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used; promises and reciprocity; risk assessment; confidentiality; informed consent; data access and ownership; interviewer mental health; advice – counseling on ethical matters; data collection boundaries; and ethical versus legal conduct (cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 233).

Gubrium et al. (2014) explain that DST facilitators must acknowledge the clear possibility that local audiences might know, or assume they know, storytellers or other people discussed in a story. This is quite relevant within the ANS context. They suggest that facilitators have conversations with storytellers to explore potential implications. Recognizing issues around

confidentiality, these researchers encourage an alternative standpoint on the ethics around this when it is safe and appropriate to do so. They argue that DST can offer the opportunity for exploring the “right to personal privacy and the right to lay claim to knowledge protection” (p. e6).

Further, digital stories can be used as conversation starters with diverse audiences including local community members to service providers, policymakers, and politicians, integrated into provider training curricula and health education materials, for example. Additionally, digital stories can be posted online and shared using social media tools and mobile devices, broadcast on radio or television, or reproduced in text format for publication (Gubrium et al., 2014).

There should be a consensus established between all collaborating partners of the research process prior to dissemination of data or stories, with the storyteller’s authority prioritized. For some groups, this may mean that stories are only shared with the project team in the workshop setting, or for other uses such as education, training, therapy, advocacy, or not at all (Gubrium et al., 2014).

Finally, consent can be complicated and unclear with DST, as there is an inability to request a blanket-type consent process for dissemination of data. Gubrium et al. (2014) acknowledge that stories may change over time, but clear goals should be identified and articulated for supporting the production and sharing of stories in ways that aim to improve the lives of workshop participants and their communities, while acknowledging ethical complexities of the process and outcomes. Gubrium et al. (2014) present some questions that can be asked regarding the release-of-materials process: What timeframe does the release cover? How can participants be given the option to request an out if they initially agree to publicly release their

stories but decide later that they do not want the stories to be circulated? How can funders and community partners be educated about the importance of including such an option? What is the best way of addressing the limitations of such an out when it comes to the online distribution of stories? What happens if participants simply want to edit or change their story? (p. e7).

There was an on-going consent process throughout the duration of the research study. The stages where consent was obtained, in written and verbal form, were at the onset prior to the first point of engagement; the end when digital stories were completed and ready for sharing; and finally, for ongoing sharing and dissemination of data after the study's completion, with the option to withdraw consent at any time thereafter.

The implications of publicly sharing information included in their storytelling journeys were shared with co-researchers throughout the research process, including when participants agree to make stories; when narratives were being shared in a story circle and crafted in scripts; and still again when participants were making decisions about what images to include or not include.

An ethics proposal application was completed and submitted to Mount Saint Vincent University. Key ethical considerations were outlined through this process, and participants were given a copy of a condensed version with the requirement to consent to participate. The consent form was emailed to co-researchers prior to the first workshop and was also read with participants during the workshop to ensure that they fully understood the scope of the study; their participating role and responsibilities; and their ability to voluntarily withdrawal from the study at any time.

Included in the ethics application and provided to the co-researchers was the inclusion of a list of culturally responsive counsellors, services, and resources that could be accessed if participants required them, given the nature of the topic and the process of uncovering and understanding the impact of trauma that might be identified by the co-researchers. I informed co-researchers of the boundaries that I must maintain as a researcher who happens to also be a therapist and the clarity of the role of researcher that I hold in this context, while also acknowledging the benefit of having a clinical background. Therefore, being able to ethically offer support to participants was an important part of mitigating any risks that may have arisen by participating in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed participatory research, and the methodology of DST applied in this research study. Limitations, research recruitment, ongoing consent process, data collection and analysis, timeline, trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations were also all outlined. The following chapter will discuss the findings of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

In the last chapter, I discussed the methodology of participatory research and the specific method of digital study. I outlined the process of conducting a DST research study and an overview of why it is an appropriate method to use with members of the ANS community. With the use of thematic analysis, patterns were identified in the data and codes were assigned to create themes. In this chapter I will present the findings of this study through several identified themes that were found in both the digital stories and DST process. The findings of this study tell a story of the pain and defeat that race-related trauma can manifest. It also tells of the individual and collective strength, resilience, and self-determination that comes from the will, and in some cases, necessity, to keep pressing forward. Participants shared through DST their personal stories of the anti-Black racism trauma endured throughout their life journeys. This study has revealed many themes through thematic analysis, an encoding process that connects the data through specific pattern and codes, which I explained in chapter three.

The data of this study consists of the digital stories created by the co-researchers and the transcripts of the discussions by the whole group, as well as my research field notes. I begin by introducing the digital stories created by the six co-researchers, and then present the themes that were identified across data sets: “Love and war; Childhood reflections”; “Importance of identity”; “The impact of Race-based trauma on health: An on-going attack”; “Walking in my truth; Living and loving the skin I am in”; “Digitizing the story”; and “Benefits of the DST process”. Each theme has sub-themes. The overarching theme includes various perspectives of how co-researchers spoke to it. Therefore, sub-themes were created to understand the complexities of such theme. As a participatory research methodology, these are “Their Stories: Digital Stories & Descriptions”.

As noted above, this study aimed to explore the impact of race-based trauma on a small group of ANS adults through the use of DST. Bringing narrative approaches and technology together, DST is a means of sharing powerful stories through video. Co-researchers created digital stories to tell their stories of the trauma endured through experiences of anti-Black racism over their lives. Many of the themes identified in the digital stories were in line with the themes found in the transcripts in which the co-researchers discussed the DST process.

Reflected in all the digital stories was a personalized element of one's connection to the experiences of anti-Black racism shared in the DST workshops. There was a clear understanding of the research purpose and through the digital stories of the six co-researchers, the research question was adequately responded to. Co-researchers identified through their digital stories that race-based trauma does indeed exist and has been experienced amongst this specific sample group in accumulation. These experiences have included being excluded and 'othered', and feelings of discouragement, exhaustion, and defeat. Each co-researcher was asked to provide a title and description of their digital story, as to inform viewers of the context in which their digital stories were created. The digital stories created by co-researchers can be found at this link:

[This is My Story: Bringing Voice to Experiences of Anti-Black Racism Trauma through Digital Storytelling with Six African Nova Scotians](#)

The following descriptions were provided by co-researchers to accompany their digital stories:

1. You Can't Stop Me - Jermal

The method behind "You can't stop me," comes from my own philosophy of "the power of repetition." Being an underdog my entire life, I quickly learned at a young age the power of positive self-talk, and if you say something enough knowing that a higher

power will hear you and help you obtain whatever it is you're wishing for, it's meant to be for you. The imagery shown in the video all relates to major accomplishments, which I've had the majority of family, friends, and even teachers tell me I couldn't complete. Little did they know, they can't stop me...

2. Turning the Page: A Black Woman's Story of Racism at the Halifax Public Libraries -

Chanae

In her personal journey, Chanae faced the challenging task of navigating systemic racism while working at the Halifax Public Libraries. In her pursuit of providing valuable programs and services to the community, she encountered subtle and overt forms of discrimination by her co-workers. Despite these obstacles, she remained resilient, using her experiences to advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion within and outside the library system. Her story is a testament to the strength and determination required to address racial disparities and foster positive change within an institution.

3. Entry 33 - LaMeia

Multimedia exploration of the interactions of art, place, space, identity, and safety in the community of North Preston, Nova Scotia. Experimenting with challenging myself to face the camera and gain confidence with being the subject and creator through the lens.

4. In Living Color - Nicole

This is a story of a young Black woman who is navigating spaces where racism and unconscious bias occur. A pivotal moment, being racially profiled while shopping in the mall is an important part of how this video came to be.

5. My Roots and Resilience in Family – Sylvia

This is a story that starts with valuing resilience and is modelled from those who have gone before and form my origin's story – my parents.

6. Sticks and Stones - Angee

Sticks and stones may break your bones but when anti-Black names like “Woolly Mammoth” are hurled at you, they injure your spirit. The first time I realized my very Blackness was a tool white folks co-opted and used to dehumanize Black folks, I was in grade three. As a beautiful little Black girl, I went to an institution everyday called the education system aka elementary school and we were all saturated in anti-Blackness. The effects of the racial taunting daily as a child made me begin to reject and separate from my identity early. I wanted my hair chemically straightened so I could “fit in”. The effects of this early year racial trauma followed me and continued into adulthood. Woolly Mammoth was code for images that degraded and controlled Black girls and women. This was an outside job that required some inside work. Peeling back the layers of this racial trauma was a deep job and a rewarding one as I came to learn and define who I was, on my terms, in MY language. One of the antidotes to external racism is to not internalize the racism; root yourself in who you truly are - protect your truth in self-love.

Co-researchers' Desired Goal of their Digital Story

Aligning with the literature on how to facilitate a DST process, co-researchers were asked what their goal of creating their digital story was, keeping in mind the research purpose of this study. Jermal said:

My goal was to tell like a chronological story of my life from like early childhood until present day- kind of, being with the theme of like being oppressed and always being told, “no, you can't do this, you can't do that”, or, “oh, you're Black, you'll never be able to do this, you'll never be able to do that”. And I just thought, ok- I want to portray like, you know, every barrier that's been in front of me, I crushed it. And I finish it off by saying the marathon continues because I think it is a lifelong marathon. There were more barriers in front of us and got to keep crushing them. That was kind of my logic in building this. - Jermal, DST Workshop #3.

Jermal's digital story aligned well with his goal in his choice to present a common theme of “You can't stop me”. Chanae's goal also held true to what she achieved through her digital story:

Well, the goal was definitely to entice emotion. I didn't expect people to actually like cry and stuff, though, but it was definitely a goal of mine because I wanted folks to feel basically how I'm feeling because it's not like me. I'm not a vulnerable person at all, to be quite honest. And this process, not only this story process, but the experience that I'm having in this organization is like making me be that. -DST Workshop #3.

Chanae articulates through her story how her experiences have revealed her vulnerability and at the same time, have also made her brave enough to share her story with others.

LaMeia shared that her goal was more about her own process of creating her digital story:

I don't have words- a lot of words lately- and so, it was kind of like the narrative. Why is that? What is it? What do I say? But it's not so much more about what I say, but it's more

about how I feel. And so, I think in me being able to kind of even produce the work today, it was that I had the safe space. You know, I'm here, home. I worked from home today, and I really felt like I have to show people this workspace, this place that is my safety, is my home, Blxckhouse, that we've created. Like, there's no other place that I feel like I can have that level of peace and comfort to talk about what I've been going through until I let that raw emotion come out and to want to share that with you all. - DST

Workshop #3.

Nicole's goal was also to showcase how life continues despite the hardships that one may face yet there is power in continuing the course. She said:

I just wanted to show that it's not a stop, or this happened, and it stops, or this happens in your life, this is just a moment in your life, and you continue on moving with everything else. I wanted it to show that we have to continue with the things that have happened, and we have to continue. So that's where I want to go in the end, it is always going. – Nicole, DST Workshop #3.

Similarly, Sylvia's goal was multifaceted in that her story is more than solely her own experiences, but an acknowledgment of the strength of her circle:

When I was looking at these pictures, thinking about things, I thought, I just really don't want to talk about what happened to me. I want to focus on like, what I felt like was the strength pieces, right. And so, you know, the importance of Mom and Dad. So, I went this way. I wanted to start with that [...]. Their importance then, but more so even looking back, right, and thinking about what they went through, what they went through for us. [...] Black women were always important in my life in growing. The work that we

did, in the policy stuff that was trying to capture a little bit. It was about kind of going to each other and relying on each other. [...] Here's where the strength is. You know, here's where it's been in the beginning. Here's where it's carried through. And we did figure out how to put something in place like a structure so that you have these amazing Black women from across the province who are supporting each other in whatever we understand to be success, and emotionally, and family. So, we just kept going on there and hanging in there to be able to do that. – Sylvia, DST Workshop #3.

Lastly, Angee's goal ties it all together through her desire to empower others who may have a similar story:

First of all, I want to validate those experiences- you know, because quite often, things may feel like you're alone or things are happening in a vacuum. And [I once heard] “When you stand up for yourself without even claiming it, without even knowing it, you stand up for Black women everywhere”. So, I think every time we use our voices and our gifts and our talents to do that and to take that sort of power back, I think it empowers those that are coming behind you. - DST Workshop #3

The co-researchers created specific goals for the stories they wanted to tell, which guided the creation of their individual digital stories.

Study Themes

Themes were identified throughout the DST process and within the digital stories. The following theme, “Love and War: Childhood Reflections”, is about co-researcher's first experiences of anti-Black racism trauma which occurred in their childhood. The stories also tell

the story of love, belonging, and safety in their beloved families and communities that have created a solid foundation for them.

Love and War: Childhood Reflections

All the digital stories of the co-researchers tell a story of exclusion. Co-researchers' reflections on these findings are organized into two sub-themes: "Home is where the heart is: peaceful beginnings"; and "First memories of anti-Black racism".

Home is Where the Heart is: Peaceful Beginnings. "Sticks and stones may break your bones but words like Woolly Mammoth injure your spirit." - Angee, Digital Story

All the digital stories include a glimpse into the lives of co-researchers, using photos or narration, with most starting from their early years. Jermal, Nicole, Sylvia, and Angee all reference their childhood in some way to begin their digital stories. For example, Jermal begins his digital story with his starting place: "Let's rewind- let's go back to where this all started." Jermal personalizes this even further by showing a clip of himself as a child while stating: "For y'all who don't know, my name is Jermal Mansfield, and you can't stop me" (Digital Story). Nicole begins her digital story with a photo of herself when she was a baby as she narrates this opening line: "This is where my story begins. This is where I started to gain knowledge about the world I would encounter as a Black woman" (Digital Story). Sylvia, shares a photo of her mother and father with text: "Mom and Dad, Wisdom Holders." In the background we can hear a choir singing. The next image/frame is a photo of her as a child with four other children who are her siblings as she narrates, "we drew on faith, pride, identity." Additionally, Angee begins with a photo of her family homestead while she narrates, "Somewhere in an intimate rural community in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, I was born, Angela Denise". She gets personal as she tells us "I was born Angela, but to my dad, I was LaLa and Jimbob, and Grampy and Uncle called me

Jimmy but to my mother, I was Precious- I was her Precious Pearl.” She says this with a joyful tone as photos from her childhood appear.

Prior to the first years of schooling, there appears to be a different level of protection that many ANS children experience from their family, extended family, and community. This level of protection has encouraged ANS children to be proud of where they come from; to believe in themselves and their abilities; to value and utilize the collective support within their communities; and to celebrate their cultural identity. Angee shares in her narration, while childhood photos of her and her family grace the screen for viewers of her digital story:

Born a beautiful Black girl with dreams of writing, and acting, and dancing- we laughed and played as kids in my community. But don’t forget church on Sunday morning and youth group on Monday nights, forging a love identity undeniable. I was loved by my family and my community. I even loved myself, a lot, actually. I was Black, uninterrupted.

This image of beautiful Black children with face-wide smiles exemplified the pride, happiness, and love that Angee is expressing through her narration. The importance of a loving and supportive beginning is essential to the development of culturally affirmed Indigenous ANS children. Naming this in their digital stories speaks to the significance of their childhood years and the memories that stand out as important. The love poured into them by their families helped to shape who they would become and what they would go back to throughout their life journeys. Co-researchers shared their centring of self in their communities during the DST process and in their digital stories.

This sense of empowerment, pride, happiness, and peace quickly changes when co-researchers share their experiences of leaving their home communities, specifically to go to

formal education settings outside of their communities and become immersed with children who do not look like them. Throughout their lives, co-researchers demonstrate through their digital stories how this became a common challenge for them.

First Memories of anti-Black racism. There is a consistent theme of where initial experiences of racism were experienced. While there was immense love experienced from their families and communities as children, leaving this environment unveiled a whole new world that was not so welcoming. For co-researchers of this study, this was specifically when they first left their home communities as children and entered the education system during the early grade school years. Co-researchers recall their first encounters of anti-Black racism in their early years of life. Angee says:

It really came clear to me when I first even recognized I was Black, right? When that first came to my attention was the starting point to my trauma- to my race trauma. Because we grew up in the Black community in New Glasgow. We were all Black kids and we all looked alike, and we had our own colourism stuff going on inside our communities, for sure. But we went to church- that was our safe space. We were all Black. We were all loved and respected. It wasn't until I got to school, right? And the little white boy on the playground called me, "Woolly Mammoth". I'll never forget it. He called me "Woolly Mammoth" from grade three to grade seven, and when he got to grade seven, another little white boy joined in with him to call me "Woolly Mammoth". Then "Woolly Mammoth", it evolved into "Kizzy". It evolved into "go back to Africa". –DST

Workshop #1

Kizzy is a character from the 1977 television mini-series, *Roots*. Kizzy portrayed the character of an enslaved African woman.

Similarly, Chanae also recalls multiple examples of racism that she experienced, noting the clear differences in leaving her home community, entering her school community, and then returning to her home community.

I mean, there's so many stories- it was hard for me to kind of pinpoint one because obviously, like in my younger days, I feel like I experienced quite a bit of anti-Black racism being one of the only in my schools. But in my community, Lucasville, it just- it didn't exist. I didn't even know there was another world because we all look the same, just as Angee said. Like we had our own culture and way of being, and that was my comfort. That was my safe place. So, I could go kind of put a mask in in school and then come back and be my authentic self. - DST Workshop #1

Jermal added his specific recollection of experiencing anti-Black racism growing up in his rural community: “So, when I was younger, I got called the N-word and the whole shebang”. (DST Workshop #1). Sylvia also recounted her first day of school when she experienced anti-Black racism:

Starting in school, like the first day of school, I ended up getting into what was like a fight, but it wasn't really a fight because it was like, this reaction of a hit. The way I was treated by this white boy in terms of like my dress. I had my church dress on that I was allowed to wear on the first day of school and he pulls a bow [that was] on it [...] I'm the one that's in trouble because I hit him. And then also because I'm going to say now, I guess it's almost like a reflection thing, I guess, but because there is such concern for safety for us, right, so, my thing was to be like, kind of managed and disciplined about kind of control yourself from my parents and stuff. Because I know it was about like, I

don't want you to get hurt. But it was like just such a terrible experience, like your first day at school, right. [...] '62 or '63 was the year. (DST Workshop #1)

There was a resounding consensus among the group of co-researchers that experiences of race-related trauma stemmed back to one's childhood and particularly in early education. At a time where vulnerability is at its unknowingly highest, and school being a place that is supposed to be safe, this was not the case for co-researchers in this study or for many ANS children as research has indicated (BLAC, 1994; Boudreau, 2015; Enid, Lee, 2009; Ruck, 2014). Representation and knowing who one is culturally has been proven to be crucial in the development of ANS children and students. The following theme, "Importance of Identity", describes this through the voices of co-researchers in the subthemes "I am: African Nova Scotian Identity", "Sources of Support", and "Anti-Black Racism Trauma Responses: I am not my Hair".

Importance of Identity

The importance of identity proved to be a prominent subject matter in the DST process, specifically with one's decision to identify themselves as a participant. All co-researchers chose to be identified within their digital story. This was done through text, photos, and real time video. For example, Chanae expressed: "It was important for me to put my name on it, although I didn't want to show myself". (DST Workshop #3). Co-researchers discussed their choices to include parts of their identity in the final sharing DST workshop. Sylvia explained while talking about the design of her digital story that she intended to show viewers how she "started from her strength," as she casts a photo of her mother and father in her digital story. Similarly, Angee also speaks about her parents and the significance that they played in her forming of identity, while including photos of them in her digital story and the significance they play in her life. Nicole shared her uncertainty about using a personal photo:

I was unsure I wanted to put my own picture at the beginning, but I put that because I felt like it was like a connection to me personally, where everything else was just kind of stock photos. – DST Workshop #3

Further, she explained the importance of including location:

And like, the photo was actually a photo of MicMac Mall back in the day. And then I wanted it to be Halifax- so Halifax Sports Bar- so we feel like, you know, that is the message that the city is portraying, but, you know, we've all had our experiences, so I tried to tie those things in as well. – DST Workshop #3

The photo of Halifax Sports Bar showcases the fronted street with a painted, “BLACK LIVES MATTER”, which speaks to the power of DST and the permission it gives co-researchers to unapologetically tell their truth. Three of the co-researchers were unsure about the use of identifying content when entering the DST process, but by the end, they had chosen to use some type of personal identification in their digital stories. All but one of the co-researchers decided to use their own voices to tell their digital story. LaMeia intentionally chose not to use any voice or narration in their digital story, saying:

I wanted to experiment with silence, but I also wanted to say a lot in that silence as well. And yeah, let the audio, the natural audio kind of feel. Like I heard a kid scream out or something at one point. And it's that quiet in North Preston too, right? Like, I just love that I can get that access to space and reflection because it's not the city. – DST Workshop #3.

For those co-researchers who used their voices in their digital stories, reference was made in the sharing session to tones, volume, speed, and flow. Although the most co-researchers felt

comfortable to use their own voice, not all felt safe to reveal their identity in other ways such as in their personal photos or videos. For Chanae, who chose not to use personal photos or videos, she identified the potential risks of consequences in doing so by external affiliations. For LaMeia, who chose not to use her voice in narration, she shared some of what she was trying to accomplish through her digital story:

In the reckoning of what it has felt to feel like I had a break... like, there was a breaking point that happened- to know that a part of my process is to be in the spaces that I've created, which are safe, and that there's a lot to be proud about as I look around and I see the smiling faces of children and, you know, the beauty of my community in North Preston. The T-shirt [shown in the video]. Like every memorabilia- a piece of curated art- you know, in my space is all so that the children who come here or the people who come here feel that there is love here. And so, you know, this is my everyday environment kind of as my base, and I just wanted to show you guys a little bit of that. - DST Workshop #3.

She also referred to her digital story as a “time stamp” of what she was experiencing in the moment and what can be learned watching it again ten years from now. Jermal, Sylvia, and Angee make note of legacy, looking back to the past, staying in the present, and forward to the future. For example, Jermal states: “I think it'll be cool to pass on to my kids.” – (DST Workshop #3), while Sylvia comments on intergenerational transmission of coping strategies:

Not unintentionally passing on bad habits or bad feelings to my children or my Grandchildren because I've seen times where folks can become caregivers for you, and they shouldn't be. It's not their role, it's not their time, not their age, or whatever, but just thinking about that, too. And again, I think it's important to have a safe space to vent it

out because then you don't inappropriately bring it up or whatever, right? – DST

Workshop #2

Angee acknowledges the elder wisdom while expressing her ancestral gratitude:

I just feel like I owe such a debt of gratitude to my grandmother, my great- grandmother, my great-great-grandmother to embrace like there's no reason to want to disconnect from that. I wanted to connect to it more once I knew what it was, because when you grow up, you're being told to go back to Africa, you know, and they don't make Africa sound very nice- like, you know, all those things. And all we knew was, we were slaves [in the past while] growing up in the 70s and 80s, right? So, we wanted to just get as far away from that as possible. But as I grew, like, I'm 51 now, I've gained a lot of a knowledge around who we even are as a people, and I just gravitate. I want to connect to that. – DST

Workshop #1.

The key findings that were uncovered through an intergenerational lens were variances in types of anti-Black racism encounters and experiences, responses to racism, and sources of support, such as one of the participants, the oldest in the group, Sylvia's, acknowledgment of her parents that was discussed. Her sharing of how her parents protected her and her siblings during the initial years of the civil rights movement was evident in her own analysis of era and generational teachings. She acknowledges that they did the best with what they had in those times and draws on their wisdom often. She noted that her parents' lower levels of education served as a source of motivation for her to pursue and complete post-secondary university.

Co-researchers spoke to their specific ANS heritage in both the DST process and digital story. This is explored further in the next sub-theme, "I am: African Nova Scotian Identity".

I am: African Nova Scotian Identity. The ANS identity is one of strength, perseverance, pride, and determination. This was affirmed by the co-researchers of this study by stating it specifically in their digital stories. Chanae and Sylvia both state it explicitly. Chanae shares in the first minute of her digital story, “I have been immersed in my African Nova Scotian identity since a young girl and my life experiences are reflected in my work”. Sylvia shows community pictures of the ANS community map while referencing ANS heritage: “Black Loyalists, Black Refugees” (Digital Story). She shows photos of ANS women in leadership as a crucial inclusion to her digital story. Jermal, Angee, LaMeia, and Nicole all reference being Black in Nova Scotia by naming the specific ANS communities that they are from within the digital story or digital story process.

Co-researchers identified that many of the experiences that they have endured are because of their historical and generational connection, along with their lived experiences as Indigenous ANS people. Geographical locations of communities were a conversation piece that surfaced among co-researchers as a natural means of connecting within this broader community. “Oh, you’re [name’s] daughter?” and “Who’s your people?” were questions co-researchers asked within the group setting as a way to make connection. They also spoke about their experiences within their specific home communities as it related to their experiences of anti-Black racism. Discussions amongst ANS people regarding the rural compared to urban experience of encountering racism and being provided with adequate resources and supports to navigate these experiences have been ongoing for many generations. Angee specifically references her home community, New Glasgow, as being “a little deep down there, you know- Viola Desmond, shine the big spotlight” (DST Workshop #1).

Boudreau (2015) applied this analysis in her study, as well as with participants, often referencing the need for more resources and supports to be made available within rural communities. The co-researchers of this study agree with the participants in Boudreau's (2015) study.

Further, it was noted in this study that there is great need to understand the distinct experiences of Indigenous ANS people. For example, Pachai discusses the Black community in Nova Scotia as "a divided one- terribly divided. Those who come from Africa have a place, those who come from the Caribbean have a place, those who come from the UK have a place, and so on" (Pachai as cited in Ruck, 2014, p.44). The experience of racism and discrimination that has been embedded in the very infrastructure of this province is generationally known amongst Indigenous ANS and Black newcomers and learned upon arrival. While there is a legacy of division among these groups, ANS people have continuously fought for resources and supports to create equitable grounds to everyone else. The next sub-theme, "Sources of Support", helps to explain what has been beneficial to community members in their lives.

Sources of Support

All co-researchers identified several supports that have aided their life journeys in this province. For example, Chanae expressed her first recollection of supports through the programming she participated in as a youth: "I was the little girl going through all of these programs specific for us, and I'm grateful to now be in a position that I develop and lead the programs that are for us".

Chanae, Angee, and Nicole also speak to the influential Black women and men in their lives:

I think that with that long line of Black women that I talked about, I was prepared for certain situations [and] experiences. That was really embedded in me, which allowed me to be that strong advocate person in community and use my voice and not be shrunk and be able to speak with all my mind and say how it is, and I don't really care because that's what I was taught to be – Chanae.

Angee made a connection to the Black community: “I come from a long line of strong Black women and men, too”. Nicole concurred that Black women are important in her support: “My sisters, my support system- the strong women in my life”.

Jermal, Nicole, and Sylvia also made note of their spiritual practices, acknowledging belief in a higher power, the importance of faith, and church community in their lives.

It was noted that support within community was an important part of one’s way of coping with and facing challenges related to anti-Black racism. Chanae, Angee, and Jermal each spoke to this specifically. Chanae explained:

I come from a single parent household. My mother, who was a strong advocate in the Lucasville community, specifically advocating for adult learning, participating on many boards, committees- which is what sort of gave me the foundation to continue those efforts in education program development. I have a strong line of Black women, mentors, [and] supports [...]. That is really what helps me get through challenges is seeking the support of others and running, you know, either a scenario or an experience or an issue by them for their feedback and strategically address whatever's happening collectively. –

DST Workshop #1

Angee spoke about her lived experience as a Black woman and how it has prepared her for dealing with challenges:

I show up very strongly in the world when it comes to dealing with challenges. So, what I normally do is, I go to my years of experience of being a Black woman in this world, and all of the women. – DST Workshop #1

Jermal explained how time, experience, and a new living and social environment has changed how he shows up in the world as a Black man in a profound way:

How do I show up in the world? That answer would have been different two years ago. Since I moved to Halifax, I show up in the world more confident, more sure of myself and my abilities. Because of that, I am radiating at a higher frequency right now. I feel like I'm on all the time. It's good. Whereas previously, two years ago, I was living in Antigonish. I wasn't surrounded by Black people. Half my life I was adopted by a white family, the later half. So, I don't spend any time with Black people in Antigonish. When I go home for the holidays, I'm surrounded by white people. Until I moved to Halifax. Now that I'm in Halifax, I am taking part, starting to realize that like, I deal with things differently because of this. I didn't realize it, until I started spending time with more Black people, and then I'm like- ok, something is off a little bit here. So, I'm going to barbershop talks that the Nova Scotia Health puts on with a bunch of Black men, for the record, to get together. Some of us will get a haircut, we'll have food, and we'll just talk about the tapes that's going on in our heads for a couple of hours. I find that's the place for me to feel safe and vulnerable. I talk about essentially what we're talking about now. This influences the way I deal with challenges, because by being around more people that look like me, I feel empowered, and when I'm feeling empowered, I don't miss. So, it's

been allowing me to really excel the last two years professionally, and there's some personal growth that's going on as I struggle to be the best version of myself. – DST

Workshop #1

These sources of supports will be expanded upon further below when discussing what co-researchers named as strategies for coping with anti-Black racism under the theme, “Walking in my truth: Living and loving the skin that I am in”.

When discussing experiences of anti-Black racism trauma, one's appearance, more specifically, their hair became a notable topic of discussion. The final sub-theme to articulate the over-arching theme of the importance of identity is “Anti-Black Racism Trauma Responses: I am not my hair”.

Anti-Black Racism Trauma Responses: I am not my Hair

Co-researchers shared their experiences of race-based trauma and the impact of this on their holistic health and emotional well-being. Many of these experiences were connected to their appearance, specifically their hair. These examples of attacks on hair were described in varying contexts. Individual co-researcher responses to these experiences of trauma were discussed amongst the group which will be explored in this section. Angee, Jermal, Nicole, Chanae, and Sylvia specifically mention their hair as being racially targeted. For example, Angee specifically talks about her first experiences of noticing that she was perceived differently based on her appearance by her peers, which continued into her adulthood experiences as in a full circle recognition:

It would have been in grade three [1978]. That's when. That was the first time I actually even thought anything different about my hair- like because we all had the same hair

where I came from, and nobody said nothing. I didn't see myself differently until the white boys saw me differently. And then I went to my first sleepover and the girl's little brother looked at me when he woke up from his nap. In all, his innocence [he] said to me, 'Oh, dirty, dirty skin'. Their parents- like I loved them- they were church people, and [he] was simply noticing my skin was different and there was no malice in his [noticing], you know, and the way they even explained, it was ok. But that was the first time where that started to enter me, like as a trauma. And it showed up then later in 1995, when I was taking my youngest son to the hospital repeatedly, to advocate for his health care, and I was repeatedly turned away. [They would say] 'you're having a hard time handling it [parenting], aren't you dear?,' and all of this here sort of stuff when I was clearly advocating for my son that was sick for a whole year. And nobody listened, and they just totally ignored me. And even the day that he died, they thought that it was me in my head- they ignored me. They called in a social worker who came and sat down beside me to find out where my other son was, my oldest son, because they had seen me so much that they thought I was the problem. So, they had intentions of apprehending my children until my son died. And then they were like, 'Oh shoot!'- Right? So that's sort of the story I want to tell, because when I talked about how I show up depends because the day he died, I was in the bedroom, curling my hair, putting makeup on, and his father was saying, 'Angela, what's taking so long? Hurry up'. But I was well aware that Woolly Mammoth was showing up, right? And so, they needed to see, you know, a softer version of me so that they could tend to my child because I always felt I was the one being triaged, right? – DST Workshop #1

A pivotal event in her life, Angee chose to speak to this in her digital story. She narrates: “I couldn’t understand why he was so fixated on my hair”. She follows this with outlining the internal conflict that she was experiencing in that moment and thereafter: “I loved my hair. I loved everything about me. But I was slowly starting to wish I wasn’t even me”. - (Digital Story). Angee goes on to explain her feelings and the internal confusion that followed: “I don’t remember when it happened exactly, but I do remember feeling unsure. I remember not even wanting to be me anymore and trying so hard to be like them. I remember not feeling worthy, not feeling pretty”, while white words like “unsure, uneasy, angry, and anxious” appear stacked on the black screen and the instrumental in a solemn tune.

Jermal also recalls a specific encounter:

For the record, I used to have five years of hair growth- actually, until I chopped it off very recently for the purposes [of] my government job. And it wasn't so much the looks, it was, it's like kind of like microaggressions and fly bites over time. One or two fly bites, all right... but then when your whole body is welted, you go, yeah... that's when you start freaking out. And I was getting close to freaking out, and that's why I cut my hair because I didn't want, I just couldn't contain it anymore. I was really starting to get aggravated. So, I cut my hair. And the week after I decided to cut my hair [but hadn't cut yet], I was in the elevator with this man. It still bothers me because it was just a backhanded compliment, and he said, 'I wish I had the confidence to wear your hair'. And I was like, enraged. Yeah, I almost lost it, but I didn't. I go really silent when I get really upset. It's like [he was] saying, my hair is so ridiculous, it's like how dare [I] come to work dressed up [and hair like that]. So, I cut my hair because of the microaggressions you [another co-researcher] were talking about. – DST Workshop #1.

Nicole shares her unique experiences of anti-Black racism regarding her hair and personal invasion of space at work:

I guess there's so many different experiences. [...] One, my hair. You know, we've heard these stories all the time but in workspaces, you know, we have the comments. I've had issues with people making comments multiple times in multiple different workplace environments, and I had to address those issues, so I didn't feel safe in those spaces. But I had to come up with, you know, a plan with myself because sometimes the management didn't feel comfortable addressing that, but it's a workplace issue. You know, people are telling me, you know, how do you comb your hair? How do you get a comb through your hair? Physically touching my hair and that is my personal space. So, when other people are being reprimanded for being in people's personal space, I must address people when they physically invade my space to pull my curl. You know, I love my hair, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't make you self-conscious in some spaces, for sure. You know, [I've had] multiple experiences with that. – DST Workshop #1

This theme continued into her digital story where she narrates:

In my workspace, I work with predominantly white colleagues. There have been numerous times and numerous different jobs where my hair has been questioned. The comments started to flow, and people have touched and pulled my curls without permission. - Digital Story.

She provides another example:

At work I'm in meetings and it's like, 'Oh my gosh, are they going to... And of course, it happens... 'Oh, I love your hair', and you're like, ok, I'm going to go on this meeting today, Is my hair presentable? [...] But I worry about...do my curls look presentable? Can I wear a messy bun? I don't feel like I can, because you have comments that you internalize, and we internalize a lot of those things.

As Nicole continues to describe other experiences of anti-Black racism, she returns to the feeling of humiliation that she felt in the incident referenced above: "I never was ever made to feel that humiliated, and I didn't realize how humiliated I felt." – DST Workshop #1.

Similarly, Chanae also spoke about comments being made to her daily by colleagues surrounding her appearance and hair specifically: "Wow, your hair looks so different today". - (Digital Story). Further, she explains how she has even had comments made about how she speaks: "You know, you speak differently in person than you do on paper." She counters this with a bit of hesitancy in her voice stating: "I don't think that's what she really meant" - (Digital Story). Finally, Sylvia shares her example about hair and humiliation:

Then like in junior high [...] my hair gets all messed up. It's sticking up everywhere, you know? And everybody's like laughing at me and making fun. And I'm not even allowed to go back in to fix my hair, right? I'm just like this joke for [the] folks who all had been there. (DST Workshop #1)

As a result of these trauma-specific attacks on hair and appearance, co-researchers described how these experiences have impacted their lives in numerous ways, including their self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. Nicole and Angee share their truth. Nicole narrates in her digital story: "I am constantly worrying if my hair is work appropriate- pre-

planning answers so that if anyone makes a comment, I can mitigate the freeze response.” - (Digital Story). While Angee expressed throughout the DST process:

I begged my mother for a dark and lovely [hair] relaxer back when she wasn't doing it. Like I begged her. I bothered her so much. Please, please, please, please, please, because I thought that that would make the problem go away - I'm in grade three right. So finally, by grade six, she stuck to her guns, she was never putting that in, but by grade six, she did it. And I thought I was a white girl now. I went to school. I thought, well...Like, [I thought] oh my goodness, [I thought I was] wonderful. And he [white boy] still called me Woolly Mammoth. (Angee, DST Workshop #1)

This comment was said with laughter and a chorus of laughter, as the group of co-researchers chimed in. There were many instances where laughter was expressed throughout the DST workshops. This was not to disregard the hurt of the experience but more so as a natural coping response within the Black community. Collective ques for humour were recognized by the entire group when experiences were shared that were collectively understood. Not only was humour expressed with the recalling of experiences shared, but it was also referenced as a coping strategy in general and noted as an intentional act of resistance. Multiple co-researchers alluded to the ways in which humour has helped them cope. For example, LaMeia expressed a desire to bring some of this into her digital story: “I want to bring the humour in - the funniness about like, you know, oh if we re-enact how dumb, and like how stupid it was of what happened, even in terms of how stupid he [perpetrator or racism] made himself look.” (DST Workshop #2). Additionally, Angee mentioned how she “plays games with racism” (DST Workshop #1), in the sense of still choosing to be friendly, sometimes, extra friendly, to people who outwardly do not want to engage with her.

The accumulation of these experiences of racism stated by co-researchers contributed to the exploration of how digital stories would be created as Angee expressed above. Co-researchers shared general and specific experiences that they were interested in highlighting in their digital stories, with many referencing targets toward their appearance.

The following theme, “The Impact of Race-Based Trauma on Health: An On-Going Attack” will delve deeper into race-based trauma responses through the impact of race-based trauma on the health of co-researchers in this study. This will be further explained through three sub-themes: “Internalized racism”; “Exclusion and othering”; “Racial battle fatigue”; and “Taking action against assault”.

The Impact of race-based trauma on health: An on-going attack

Research has proven that there is indeed a multitude of health implications, resulting from trauma endured. Impacts of trauma on one’s health and well-being can be experienced in several different ways within a person’s mind and body, and one might argue, their soul. Throughout the DST process, as well as in the digital stories, co-researchers acknowledged the various health implications that they have observed as impacts of the accumulation of experiences of race-based trauma in their lives. It was noted that a specific experience may have attributed to their current state of well-being, quality of life, or ultimate decision to address a specific incident in specific ways; however, the accumulation of experiences is what was highlighted as cause.

As discussed in the literature review chapter, African Canadians in Halifax experienced the greatest level of racism-related stress compared to those living in Calgary and Toronto (James & Lloyd, 2013). This speaks to the historical implications of anti-Black racism in Halifax

that continue to persist in the twenty-first century. Angee, Sylvia, LaMeia, and Chanae speak to this specifically. Angee stated: “Full disclosure [...], I do have some mental health conditions that are a result of systemic racism in the workplace” (DST Workshop #1). She elaborated further upon the sharing of experiences of anti-Black racism amongst the group:

And why does it take for it [experiences of racism] to accumulate [in order] for them to [recognize it]? Right now, they’ll recognize in me because the injury was so big that I have complex post-traumatic stress disorder, as a result of systemic racism and sexual harassment in the workplace. Now they’ll say that because it took me out. And I was like, really, really ill, from 2016 to 2019. I didn’t understand it. I was like, ok, I’ve been Black my whole life. I’ve been navigating being a Black woman my whole life. I’m confident. I would laugh [at racism] [...]- I would use my humor that way. Like, I wouldn’t allow racism to get me. That’s what I told my psychiatrist back in 2017. [...] But it kept going and going and going and going and going. And all of a sudden, when the bottom fell out, all of those experiences came to the top. So, it wasn’t just that one, right? (DST Workshop #1)

Sylvia concurred, speaking to the experiences in workspaces where one may try to effect change, while also dealing with ongoing trauma:

So, I think the thing for me is more about working in spaces that were predominantly white spaces and how totally draining it was to have to like, every day, figure out, what can I say in here? How to say it exactly? Most times, your jobs were going to community like you’re the equity person, so that’s the work that you’re trying to figure out and going to make something happen. [...]. So, the part about not being discouraged or like trying to be strong in that- it’s this ongoing trauma about trying to figure out every day how you

navigate something so you can get something done. Sometimes it's about, you know, keeping your job but not even necessarily keeping your job because we do have such heart for the spaces, and we are proud of what we do. And it's just like trying to figure out how you get it done. What do you see? How do you talk to this person? That person? What do you kind of take away? (DST Workshop #1)

Additionally, LaMeia, references the impact of race-based trauma on her whole being:

I think the other part about it, in my home also, is like- you know, there has been things that have hurt me in this home, [...] but in my own body home, right, too. So, I think that's also another part that no matter where I go, I kind of carry the hurts of what happened. (DST Workshop #3)

This connects to something she noted in DST workshop #2 while discussing the physical manifestations that she has felt due to experiences of anti-Black racism:

So, in my beautiful world, it's all Black and excellence and all of that like support, and then I have this whole other side of, you know, being in a lot of white spaces. And for me, I don't know if I really, truly felt it so deeply in my body until I did become an executive director, and both film and theatre are very Eurocentric dominated. [...] So, I experienced a lot of microaggressions at work, and still dealing with microaggressions at work and because they're actors, it's really interesting because I don't really know what's an act or what is true. So, it's just been really hard. (DST Workshop #2)

As well, Chanae provides examples of comments from her white colleagues in her digital story:

“Maybe you should tone it down. You’re too assertive toward your staff [...]. You actually did a

good job! You don't have to be so adversarial". (Digital Story). She demonstrates this through a video clip of a young Black girl with distress on her face.

There was a collective acknowledgment of this impact among the group through head nods, "mmhms", and "yeps", as a recognition of understanding or agreement. Co-researchers were respectful of others telling their stories from their perspectives, and at times, threw in words or phrases to relate to what a co-researchers may have been describing. This was due to a shared or collective understanding of what that co-researcher had experienced.

Trauma exposure responses were described in various ways by co-researchers throughout this study. Nicole shares:

Another major experience I had is I felt I was racially profiled two years ago. I was in a store. And this is ongoing. I was in a store, and I was looking at a black bodysuit in a wall of black bodysuits- different styles, small, medium, large, extra-large. I walked to the back of a store and came to the front of the store, and I put the bodysuit down. When I left the store, I could hear a voice that was closer than I felt it should have been, so I looked back, and I saw the manager of the store watching me walk down the mall, and I was like, why is she watching me? And I mean to some people, you might be like whatever, but as Black people, sometimes we're hypervigilant and we noticed those things. So, I walked to another store, and I was looking around. I was on the phone, and I had my ear buds in, and I looked over to my left and I saw the manager walking past another store that I was in and watching me. When I came out of the store, I knew something was up, and I watched her walk to the garbage can, pretend that she put something in the garbage can and walked back. And as I walked out of a completely different store it was multiple stores down- she approached me and asked me, "Where

was the body suit that I had in her store?” And I said, “Pardon me?” - and she said, “Where's the bodysuit? You had it in my store because I can't find it”. I'm like, it was a black bodysuit- you don't know what size I had, what style I had, but you're approaching me outside of another store? You're not even supposed to leave your store. People were watching. I was humiliated. (DST Workshop #1)

Being racially profiled or “Shopping while Black”; a term referenced within the Black community to allude to racial profiling in retail stores, is something that can be experienced early in life. These types of experiences make it feel unsafe and uncomfortable for Black people to engage in daily necessity activities such as shopping for food or clothing. Nicole also expresses the accumulative effect of anti-Black racism providing more examples on how it has impacted her life in practical ways:

[I have heard people say] ‘Oh, her hair's not done’ how [they] think it should be done. So, I feel like when I'm [going to a] store and I don't feel like I am presentable, I'm just running in and out, I feel like they're always watching me. And that's because of the experiences- because of my hair. It's [also] because of the experience because how I was made to feel that day [racially profiled]. So, all of those things are intermingling as to how I navigate as a younger Black woman in corporate spaces, in retail spaces. You know, you don't have one or the other, and you have all these things.

Drawing on Carter's (2007) definition of “race-based traumatic stress injury”, Nicole discusses this phenomenon in context:

I think that's the thing that we experience as Black people- we don't realize the trauma [of anti-Black racism] until it builds, or you don't realize until years later: ok, that connected to that. This is trauma. And it's not recognized. (DST Workshop #1)

In addition to the trauma endured and felt, Nicole shared how her responses to such trauma have varied:

My mom gets mad at me [when telling her of experiences of racism] because I don't say anything [in the moment]. I don't say anything. I don't say anything. I don't say anything. And I don't know what to say. And then one thing [happens] and it's like, I explode. And she's like, what's going on? (DST Workshop #1)

As noted above, this study explored the varying ways that co-researchers expressed the manifestation of trauma experienced in their own lives. Some co-researchers chose to share their own health information as it related to the research topic, such as diagnosis and treatment options. This connects to the following theme, “Internalizing Anti-Black Racism”.

Internalizing Anti-Black Racism

The impact of anti-Black racism on one’s health and well-being can be understood in several ways. The internalizing of anti-Black racism at any given time throughout their lives was evident among co-researchers of this study. All six co-researchers described the ways in which anti-Black racism has lived within their minds and spirits, which comes at a cost. For example, Angee discusses how numerous experiences of anti-Black racism have impacted how she has viewed herself and ultimately compromised her well-being:

Oh, I internalized it [the racism] instantly, and I wanted to change my appearance. I wanted to change my Blackness. In fact, I was rejecting my Blackness, although I didn't

have the language to phrase it that way. That's what I was doing- right. And so instantly. And did I know that it was changing me? No. You know, I only knew when the big breakdown came in 2016, because then all of that all came out right. But instantly, it had an effect because I wanted to change who I naturally was and was ok with it up until that aggression- right. (DST Workshop #2)

Nicole conveys her frustrations:

So, for me, I have internalized a lot of it and didn't realize, why do I feel so uncomfortable? Like, I shouldn't have to feel like looking over my shoulder if I see somebody looking. I feel like, oh, I have to ensure that they know that I'm buying something. I shouldn't have to feel like that. (DST Workshop #1)

The Women's Theological Centre (1995) discusses the concept of internalized racism, which can be defined as:

the situation that occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power. (Bivens, 1995)

They argue internalized racism is a systematic response to the social construct of racism (Bivens, 1995). Like what was discussed above as trauma exposure responses, internalized racism can be both an individualized and collective response. As noted by Angee, the rejection of Blackness is an example of internalized racism. Johnson (2008) also emphasizes that internalized racism involves both the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy that favors whites consistently ranked above people of colour.

This concept of internalized racism was largely highlighted throughout the DST process in the sharing of stories by co-researchers. In addition to the internal minimizing of self, when recounting stories of experiences of race-based trauma, the question of validity that racism was what was really happening was at the forefront for co-researchers. Contributing to these feelings were examples of gaslighting and lack of cultural sensitivity and understanding from non-Black colleagues. Chanae shares an example of this that she has faced:

So that's one of the examples that I want to share [in my digital story], because I remember I was in a meeting, and I didn't want to explain what my plans were for the [task]. And I knew I had a concrete plan that I wanted to execute, but I was like, I don't want to share it with the senior management team because I already know it's going to be picked apart, criticized- they're not going to trust it. And so, I asked my senior manager to write it for me, and to literally read it [to the team]. And I explained to her [previously] that the reactions that everybody else gets are completely different from mine. And she tried to explain, "That's not happening, it's in your head. Your ideas are great, and you should do it". And I was like, "No, you're going to write it [what I will present]". And so, she wrote it. And [while everyone else was presenting their ideas], everybody was like, "Yes, this is great". When my turn came, "Awesome- ok, Chanae, what do you have?" And I explained...then all the hands went up. I saw all the eye rolls and then everyone's like, "Are you sure?"- like, I don't think that's the best use of your time- "blah blah blah". And I was like, well, first of all, in my head, this ain't even my plan. This is your staff's plan. And she never spoke up to say, like, even though she knew she wrote this, this wasn't my plan. No matter what I say, it's negative. It's going to be criticized, no matter

what. So, I did a test and I'm sitting there looking at her, waiting for her to say something like this is not Chanae's work- this is actually mine- and she never said nothing.

There was an element of disappointment while Chanae recounted her colleague's inability to speak up despite having a conversation previously about this very thing happening. Other co-researchers supported Chanae in her thoughts and feelings with some having shared similar experiences in the workplace specifically.

Throughout the DST process, there was mentioning of the inner questioning of whether what was being experienced was in fact racism, as to prevent or avoid accusations of making it a racial issue or “pulling the race card”, so to speak. Nicole gives an example of this questioning when experiencing racial profiling: “What just happened here? Did what I think just happened, really happen?” (DST Workshop #1). Nicole and LaMeia provide an example of uncertainty when told by the perpetrator of racism that it did not occur. Nicole explains:

You know, I called. I made a post about it [on social media] and somebody in-boxed me [on social media], and they were like, this [call] is what you need to do. So, I called, they told me that it was not [racism]. That [the encounter] didn't happen [the way I described it]. (DST Workshop #1)

As well, LaMeia described a standout incident that she was told was not racially fuelled, but it was an anti-Black racist incident which made her feel unsafe in her own home: “I, along with some guests, experienced a really horrendous act of violence and racism [by the management in the apartment building where I lived. [...] Like, I was violated in my home” (DST Workshop #2).

Co-researchers acknowledged that there was often uncertainty around what was being experienced, because they were unaware of the perpetrator's intent and because they have

continually experienced a constant denial of racism. Additionally, co-researchers would find themselves questioning their analysis of the situation at times Co-researchers explained that they were sometimes not sure if they were experiencing racism or not and began to look inward.

Chanae expressed her frustrations when considering applying for a more senior position in her workplace. While confidence was not her initial barrier, other factors created challenges for her which then began to affect her workplace voice and contributions:

What they did was change that job because they knew I wanted that position. And they knew I could take that position, and they would not give me that power to be the director. So, they changed the qualifications. They added a degree [that I didn't have]. [...] In normal circumstances, I would have absolutely applied because I had no doubt. I think it was like a month of me being at [workplace] and I was like, I know I can do a way better job. And it was like every little thing that started kind of minimizing me. (DST Workshop #1)

Thomas, et al. (2020) report that the ANS women in their study acknowledge the challenges associated with lack of self-confidence due to barriers such as trauma, stress, isolation, and health issues. The study, which involved 21 ANS women participants working in the public sector identified various barriers that existed for them in the workplace. One participant noted an “internal voice saying you’re not qualified for – you’re not good enough for that...” (p. 107) when speaking about applying for roles within the public sector. They identified this as a confidence barrier and as well as a racial barrier.

LaMeia also described the silencing of her pain resulting from the race trauma she endured in her home apartment and feeling the need to “be quiet with my grieving heart.” (DST Workshop #3)

Coping with the trauma endured from experiences of anti-Black racism was something that co-researchers discussed within the DST workshops, along with the responses as outlined above. Specifically, in workshops #1 and #2, it was noted that there was minimal recognition of any coping strategies and often limited attention was paid to how one copes- healthy or unhealthy. Moreover, when the trauma of racism occurred, often the internalization of racism was identified as a coping response for co-researchers. This was acknowledged in the capacity of how to deal with the experience and its impacts as Angee noted above. As well, it was identified as how one chooses to respond to racism to protect their own well-being or need in that specific moment. Sylvia, LaMeia, Angee, and Jermal share examples of coping. Sylvia explains:

So, this thing about speaking for yourself, right, and being able to say and be heard is just so wearing, right. [...] One of the things I found with telling them [family and community members] stories, is that we didn't really have any good coping skills to be strong in the moment. In some ways, we were just like traumatizing each other. So, telling the stories, you know, too much until we got kind of, you know, I guess something happened better for us, but it was like telling those stories and my brothers wanting to go and protect me, right. Or I didn't want to tell too much to my sister because I didn't want her to feel it and then to be kind of more watchful for herself or something. (DST Workshop #1)

Related to speaking up for oneself, LaMeia shares how she turned to social media to bring awareness to others about her experience while also seeking a community of support:

I think that there's also this thing of like... I posted a video online like on Instagram so that I could create some community with me around this and Instagram took it down. And it was also kind of really weird that I had that shadow band thing happen to me, where like all of a sudden, my Instagram was like being monitored. And so, just the surveillance of it and all that kind of stuff just kind of freaked me out a little bit more. And just like, what can I say about this experience- what has happened to me at this company is so powerful and like the silencing and just all of that. So, it was very traumatic. (DST Workshop #2)

Angee talks about her lack of healthy coping skills at one time in her life:

Um, I internalized it. So, I really didn't cope. I just sort of internalized it, and then it became my way of being, right- where I knew that in certain spaces, I had to show up a certain way or I would be rejected. Like, you know, Woolly Mammoth kept getting rejected when she showed up, especially me. (DST Workshop #1)

While Jermal describes his acknowledgment of the saying, when you know better, you do better:

I kind of was on my own dealing with racism as a child until I got to a certain age. [...]
As I got older, more recently, I kind of feel like a lot of traumas are unaddressed, and I've had some unhealthy coping mechanisms- not harmful or anything, but it all ties back into when I was younger. I started to realize some tendencies I have already started when I was younger, and it wasn't until I started going to the barbershop talks that I kind of realized, hey, it's like, "Oh yeah, that's what happens to me, too", and then another guy pops up [saying the same]. (DST Workshop #1)

LaMeia also speaks to her coping choices:

So, you know, the rent strike was really powerful for me, and it was the only thing that could keep me in my dignity, knowing that I was no longer giving these folks money when they were not keeping me safe. And so, you know, at the end of the day, it's like, yes, I owe them, but they owe me so much more. And so, I think that's what I just had to keep saying in my head. (DST Workshop #2)

When coping was recognized, it was often sought through intentional strategies such as therapy and therapeutic settings, education, facilitated discussions, or storytelling. For example: remembrance of ancestors and the wisdom gained from maturity, were acknowledged by Angee:

I've gained a lot of a knowledge around who we are as a people, I want to connect to that. So [connection is] probably the biggest part of knowing who you are and that you're not these things [slaves; a woolly mammoth]. Those are narratives that were created for you. (DST Workshop #1)

Similarly, Jermal explains that he uses the negativity of race-based traumatic experiences to fuel positivity in his life. He shared about the complexities of his early years being raised with “uneducated parents” and how he was left to deal with anti-Black racism often alone yet also referencing influential teachings from his uncle:

Ever since I was in grade four or five- I think it's because I had a hard uncle who I kind of leaned on a little bit when I was younger- and I realized from a young age, you can either use it [racism] to make you stronger or you can use it to send you on a spiral. So, I always chose to make it stronger, even though I fake it sometimes. But that's the power of the mind. Sometimes just by faking it, they eventually believe that, like, you know, you're stronger than you are, and then that will hold you over that period while you're hurting.

When you look back on it, it's like, oh, geez, I was in rough shape, but you know what? I made it through that. So, in terms of anything I did to cope with it, I guess I used what happened to me to make me stronger. I still do today.

(DST Workshop #1)

The mentioning of pets as therapeutic was also noted by LaMeia who said that her pet dog has been helpful and grounding for her in her journey of dealing with anti-Black racism.

All co-researchers spoke about the constant questioning of self with the “could haves”, “should haves”, and “would haves” after the fact. Nicole stated specifically:

You're like, I should have done this. I should have told them this. I should have said this. And the people in the store are looking at me like they pitied [me]. But in a way, looking at me like they're in shock that that just happened. And so, [there are] a lot of things that I didn't realize, and I'm still realizing certain things now that transpired then [and] how it affects me today. (DST Workshop #1)

Chanae talks about believing that she was prepared to combat anti-Black racism, yet was still traumatized when experiencing it:

I think that with that long line of Black women that I talked about, I was prepared for certain situations and experiences. That was really embedded in me, which allowed me to be that strong advocate person in community and use my voice and not be shrunk and be able to speak with all my mind and say how it is, and I don't really care because that's what I was taught to be. [I was the] girl that went through all of these programs to prepare me to enter the spaces. I worked predominately my whole life in Black organizations or was surrounded with Black people. I delivered workshops, training presentations,

programs to Black people to prepare them specifically for things that I'm now experiencing that I had never experienced before. (DST Workshop #1)

She explains how her high self-confidence has been minimized in her workplace position as a result of anti-Black racism trauma:

So now being that same strong headed Black woman in a predominantly, well, not predominantly- an all-white organization because I am the colour, has been traumatic, like extremely traumatic. And I thought that I had all of the tools, the resources to be able to combat all of those issues like that I'm experiencing, and I recognize my support system isn't there. And that's why I'm kind of crumbling and I don't have somebody that I can just be myself with or somebody that I can explain what's going on and help me figure it out. I have, like, people on the outside that I can talk to, but they're not in there to be able to help me navigate like on a day-to-day. So, there's been so many times like that I felt like I was a very confident person- like very confident in my ideas and confident in who I am. And that sort of started to diminish where I say nothing. So, if they ask for my advice or, like, things like that, I don't feel comfortable sharing because I don't get the same reaction as everybody else. I started minimizing myself. I don't speak up in meetings anymore. I deal with what I have to deal with, and I let everything else kind of go and just control what I can control. They just don't understand, like, what they're doing to me. I sought therapy for this because I was like, I have nobody in the system to kind of like, talk to and have on my shoulders. And none of these people think that what I deem as being completely anti-Black racism [actually is]. (DST Workshop #1)

Nicole speaks about the learned behaviours of coping with racism as a child and how this contributes to her current coping practices. She expressed the hypervigilance she experiences due to past experiences of racial profiling:

As a Black woman, how I navigate spaces - I'm hypervigilant in stores. I'm like, "are they watching me?" Because I feel like [they think] "oh, a Black person?" Do they think I can afford the things that are in this store? That's why I feel like I'm being watched, you know? Like in my head, I know I've got a job where I can afford these things but because of how I was made to feel, I feel like they're watching me. (DST Workshop #1)

She shares how the experiences she has considered to be the foundation of her digital story have contributed to how she navigates spaces. Nicole narrates: "I now navigate spaces with hypervigilance. Am I being watched as I shop? Do I need to dress nicer out in public, so I'm not profiled?" (Digital Story). This is complemented by a chart outlining a survey conducted by PEW Research Centre with American adults in 2019 on "Race in America". It states that since Trump was elected, "Most say it's now more common for people to express racist or racially insensitive views," with it being 65 per cent more common and 45 per cent more acceptable for people to express racist or racially insensitive views. Additionally, Nicole explains that she is "constantly looking around to see if someone is watching what she is picking up or putting down." (Digital Story)

This socially conditioned belief that someone who looks presentable or who possesses wealth is not someone who is Black was alluded to in different ways by co-researchers throughout the DST process and digital stories. They discussed the complex effects of navigating anti-Black racism. Similarly, to the conditioning that Black men have had when interacting with a white person in authority, Sylvia describes the weight that Black people face while just trying

to live: “Yeah. That impact when things happen and it makes you always kind of, you know, thinking through what you say before what you do and yeah, there's such a burden”. (DST Workshop #3)

The next sub-theme discusses the many exclusionary measures that exist to other and create barriers for ANS people. Racial battle fatigue is presented as a phenomenon that co-researchers experience.

Exclusion and Othering: Racial Battle Fatigue. LaMeia, who chose not to use any voice narration in her digital story and instead used text and video footage, shares with viewers through her digital story the inability for safety within her home. She writes: “I was made to feel unsafe in my home”. This is followed by “and it BROKE me” (LaMeia, Digital Story). For many people of African descent, the weight of anti-Black racism can feel so heavy. Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) can be a result of various forms of encounters with racism, including the daily verbal attacks through racial microaggressions, overt comments, phrases, assumptions, and intentional silencing. Co-researchers have shared examples of this within their digital stories. RBF can also be caused by the hypervigilance that people of African descent face throughout their lives, interacting with systems and institutions. This additionally applies to the performing of regular day-to-day tasks, like shopping or driving, and the high potential of racial profiling or surveillance, which co-researchers also show us through their digital stories. Nicole spoke specifically of her experience with racial profiling:

In my last space, I was racially profiled in a retail clothing store. I was followed outside by that manager and approached in front of a totally different store in front of others. I was questioned as to where the specific items I had in my hand in her store were at. This was done in the middle of the mall. (Digital Story)

Nicole spoke about how she was made to feel after being racially profiled in the middle of a mall: “I was made to feel small, embarrassed, angry, less than” (Digital Story). In the digital story process, when Nicole shared this example, she acknowledged her inability in that moment to adequately challenge the perpetrator of this attack. When reporting on incidents of racism, specifically racial profiling, co-researchers explained that they were not believed. Specifically, Nicole shares: “When I reported this situation, I was told that this didn’t happen, and it was due to covid protocol that I was questioned” (Digital Story).

Similarly, Angee shares her experience through her digital story: “Everywhere I went, it seemed to be the message that I was not to be believed or not to be accepted in my workplaces, and in public spaces, and even at the hospital.” While she narrates, words such as “depressed”, “afraid”, and “low self-esteem” appear in large, white font on a black background, and then transitionally minimize from top to bottom.

All co-researchers referenced their workspaces at one time or another as sites of oppression where they experienced anti-Black racism. A most profound metaphoric video clip sequence is used by Chanae to articulate the racism that is sprinkled around her workplace, and the trauma responses that she has felt as a result. She starts with a clip of five white women blowing streamer confetti into the camera while she narrates: “Working in spaces where there’s only white faces, built on white supremacist ideologies and values that holds true to their hearts, just as the books on the shelves has changed how I choose to show up to the workplace”(Digital Story). This is followed by a silent clip of a Black woman who is outwardly expressing frustration while screaming into the camera while Chanae narrates: “This once strong, self-aware, confident, creative, and not to be fucked with woman, is fading” (Digital Story). As she concludes that statement, there is a noticeably slight change in her tone of voice which comes

across as of weary, concerned, or discouraged. The third clip of this sequence shows a white woman crying while Chanae shares: “I am portrayed as the angry Black woman all while white tears are streaming down the cheeks of my white colleagues because they feel that their white children won’t have access to the same privileges that they once did.” (Digital Story). Finally, the last clip of the sequence demonstrates the constant suppression of feelings, thoughts, and opinions that Chanae experiences through a clip of a Black woman in the bathroom visibly upset when a white woman comes in. The white woman takes note of the Black woman upset and simply turns her head to continue washing and drying her hands. The instrumental that has played the entire digital story thus far quiets and Chanae narrates:

I am made to feel that my adverse reactions are wrong and that before I can speak, I must be cautious of my tone. I find myself daily having the “am I crazy” conversation [which] is exhausting. (Digital Story)

Considering the impact that race-based trauma can have on one’s whole being, despite one’s level of confidence or competence, Chanae specifically reflects on experiences in her workplace that beg for question. She states: “I am usually told that I am wrong, or that it’s not that big of a deal or that I am imagining things” (Digital Story). Nicole too, demonstrates how she has had to support her claims by choosing to offer some education to viewers of her digital story after describing the incident of hair touching and curl pulling. She asserts: “This is a microaggression, this is a history of oppression” (Digital Story). Using speech bubbles and graphics, she showcases other forms of microaggressions that can be said about other groups of racialized people: “All Asians look the same”, “Where are you really from”, “I don’t see colour”, “All Asians are good at math”, and “I don’t date Asians guys”. With this, she explains that these have been microaggressions said by white colleagues: “In these same workspaces, I work with

colleagues, white colleagues, who have made comments and inappropriate statements about other races and ethnicities” (Digital Story). This is followed by her own contemplations: “I am made to question about what is said about me or my Black culture when I am not around.” A graphic of “does my Blackness offend you” transitions into view (Digital Story).

Words such as “mistrust” and “skepticism” were used by some co-researchers in explaining how their colleagues interact with them. They use terms like “imposter syndrome,” “microaggressions”, and “gas-lighting”. For example, in her digital story, Chanae says in a voice-over, while showing a video clip of a Black woman on her knees praying:

The unconscious gaslighting takes time and energy away from dismantling its white supremacist structure and instead redirects to defending myself and my responses to what is in fact racism. I thought I had the tools in my back pocket. I thought I had the strategies. I read, wrote, resent, and researched every God-damn book on this very topic but nothing has prepared me for the racial fatigue that I feel on a continuous basis. I feel my light dimming. (Digital Story)

Began et al. (2012) have found, for many women of African descent, spirituality is a pillar to one’s ability to cope with racism-related stress. Nicole also shares a graphic of “The impact of Racism on Mental Health” by the Depression Project with an animated Black woman character in distress. The words, “racism and mental health” in the title are bolded and highlighted in blue while all other text is in black. The graphic includes smaller words such as “worry”, “second-guessing things”, “increased risk of depression and anxiety”, and “trauma”, to name a few. Nicole describes the reality of questioning microaggressions and feelings of “defeat and tiredness” as we see the graphic. As well, Angee and Chanae share about their internal struggles resulting from their experiences with anti-Black racism. Angee states: “I became so

conflicted with who I was...” as a photo of her with tears running from her eyes appeared on the screen (Digital Story). Chanae proclaims: “I am now in my 30s and realizing that sometimes, standing in your truth comes at a cost” (Digital Story). The following sub-theme will describe some of the actions that co-researchers have taken to address the anti-Black racism they have experienced.

Taking Action Against Assault. Making the choice to pursue formalized action to address anti-Black racism is no light feat. It takes courage, patience, and in some cases, financial commitment. Three co-researchers shared with the group, specifically, the legal actions that they have or are currently pursuing because of specific race-based traumatic experiences endured. LaMeia, Nicole, and Angee have all chosen to pursue some form of legal process. For example, LaMeia expressed how one seemingly small incident spiraled into something much larger, causing more harm:

I've been really kind of struggling and challenged with just the depth of the impact from an event that was very, very small in a sense of like the timing, and just like the petty of it. Like it was such a small thing that totally turned my life in another direction because from there, I was substantially triggered, and then feeling already alone and isolated, living in the downtown area anyway. And so that kind of created a whole lot of other like... downward things for me and triggered me a lot. So, you know, like happily and thank God that, you know, I'm in such a healthier space now since that incident, and I did go to court- we've been in court. And so, there's like court processes and stuff happening. So, I feel really good for standing up for myself in that. But it still is like weighing on me in this deep way. (DST Workshop #2)

Nicole discusses her pursuit for justice:

So, I pretty much like, I just disengaged from the company, and I went to the Human Rights Commission. Of course, it takes a while. So, one of the things that they [the company] came back with in their rebuttal was that I was aggressive with the employee, and I wanted financial gain. And I never asked for anything financially. They told me that they offered gift cards, and I said yes, but, that you [the store] said that because of Black Lives Matter, and they wanted to donate them in my name to support Black Lives Matter. So how do you turn around and tell me it wasn't a racial issue? So now I'm still dealing with that.

While she chose to pursue a Human Rights case, she continues to be re-traumatized through the process:

And one of the things that has been affecting me, I feel like, is, I've been avoiding this human rights thing. So, she'll email me [...] I will ignore. I'll get back to her a couple of weeks later, and she's like, "Oh, [I would appreciate] your prompt response..." and I'm like, I'm sorry, but I just, every time I think about it, I'm like, I can't deal with it. I don't know how to answer the questions. I don't know how to navigate this, and I avoid it, because a) I don't know how to navigate it; and b) because I feel the trauma from the experience. (DST, Workshop #1)

With this also came the acknowledgment of the re-traumatization or re-injury that can be experienced in these processes. This can happen in several ways including recounting the experience, being made to provide information repeatedly, having your experience minimized, inappropriate settlement agreements, and more, which Angee discusses:

I'm in a process that's going on and on, too. Yeah, seven years. Yes, it continues. The injury just keeps going and going and going. And then you fall down, and you get back up and say, I got this- you know, I got shiny skills that I can polish off and get back into the world and stuff. And then something else happens. You go to court, or something happens. And then they don't understand that repetitive nature of repeating and keep talking- it continues to reinjure. (DST Workshop #2)

While co-researchers were very aware of the ways that they have been challenged by the lies and internalization of Black inferiority, they have not allowed this to halt their desire to progress above and beyond. A tight rope to walk, co-researchers discussed the necessity to walk in their truth. Co-researchers' strengths will be discussed through the following theme: "Walking in my truth; Living and loving the skin I'm in".

Walking in my Truth: Living and loving the skin I am in. "These incidents have left me to navigate spaces as a young Black woman." (Nicole, Digital Story)

It was expressed by co-researchers, in both the DST process and in their digital stories, the importance of walking in their truth and being true to who they are. This was observed in some of the themes explained above through co-researcher voices. It will be further discussed through the following sub-themes: "Resilience"; "Self-Determination (Kujichugulia)"; and "Renewed awareness".

Resilience. Co-researchers all infused elements of resilience in their digital stories. Nicole shared that despite experiencing feelings of defeat and tiredness, due to the many anti-Black racism incidences she has experienced, it does not stop there: "But I use this story to empower others, to show that we must continue to move forward (Digital Story)." She narrates

this against a Black screen, with her voice calm yet strong. Nicole chooses the following as her final phrase, accompanied by a black and white photo of Black women with their fists powered above their heads: “And this is how my story as a Black woman continues.” (Digital Story)

Chanae also shares what has kept her going: “my life experiences are what fuel my drive for more representation as well as personal success”. She also speaks to what she has identified as personal and professional goals for her life: “It became very important to me to be a strong, confident, and visible leader” (Digital Story). Likewise, Jermal shares his mindset: “Always on the move, gotta stay hungry...cause’ you can’t stop me” (Digital Story). He chose a photo of him with a heavy-duty chain on his shoulders as he flexes his arm muscles while narrating, “I’ll always break the chains, cause’ they can’t stop me” (Digital Story). Chanae expresses with confidence: “Hailing from the ancestors that built this very province, I had forgotten that I come from a resilient people. I had forgotten that I am intelligent. I had forgotten that I am strong. I had forgotten my why” (Digital Story). While Chanae narrates these powerful statements, a video of a beautiful Black woman looking at her reflection in the mirror plays as she smiles and admires herself.

While resilience is used to acknowledge the strength of certain groups of people and their ability to withstand certain attacks and assaults of discrimination against them, it does pose some concern amongst certain Black community activists. There are writers who have challenged the concept of resilience and how it can be used to justify certain discriminatory attitudes and behaviours of certain groups of people.

As shared above, Angee noted her internal conflict about who she was in her cultural identity because of her experiences with anti-Black racism: “I became so conflicted with who I was, until I realized I was 500 years of greatness. I, Woolly Mammoth, was magic” (Digital Story). She shares an intergenerational photo of five Black women dressed in dashiki shirts, a staple of West African clothing attire. As outlined in the “I Am: African Nova Scotian Identity” theme, understanding and acknowledging the unique history and presence of Indigenous ANS people in this province is crucial to this immensely important and necessary study. All six co-researchers make a point to express their Indigenous ANS identity through their digital stories, which is noteworthy. This was done through specifically stating it in voice narration or showing it through photos and video footage. One co-researcher shows a shirt that says, “North Preston,” a community in Nova Scotia known to be the oldest and largest Black community in Nova Scotia and Canada, with the highest concentration of African Canadians (North Preston, Nova Scotia, Canada, 2024). Co-researcher Sylvia also contributes: “Family roots were our strength” as a black and white family photo holds space in her digital story.

While some co-researchers noted the concept of resilience that they have claimed in their narration, others used metaphoric interpretations. LaMeia used video footage of herself looking into a mirror while observing her surroundings, which she highlighted throughout her digital story. This digital story is metaphoric, as the co-researcher chose to use one of her homes as her digital story setting while telling the story of the race trauma she experienced in her other home. In LaMeia’s digital story, after about twenty seconds after stating that she was made to feel unsafe in her home, she begins to become visibly emotional, weeping as she looks at her reflection in the mirror. You can hear her breath and sniffing in the background. Her hand covers her mouth as if to silence herself.

Self-Determination (Kujichugulia). “Always gotta keep my eye on the future... so they can’t stop me.”- Jermal (Digital Story).

As noted, self-determination was something that co-researchers demonstrated within their digital stories, as well as throughout the DST process. In line with Africentricity, self-determination is identified as one of the foundational principles that guide the framework. Kujichugulia is known as one of the Nguza Saba principles, or one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, an African American celebratory holiday (InterEchange.org, 2020). The other six principles, Umoja, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba, and Imani will be elaborated on in chapter 5.

Noteworthy are the visuals that co-researchers chose to use when channeling their demonstrations of self-determination, or Kujichugulia, whether it was through their narration of specifically stating how they have faced adversity head on or through their silence. Jermal showed video and images of himself in a luxury car heading toward Halifax on the highway along with a photo of him on a Harley Davidson motorcycle as he begins his digital story playing a few seconds of Kanye West’s song, “Jesus Walks”. This utilization of luxury symbolizes movement forward, or upward in terms of material status. As referenced, LaMeia used natural silence within her entire digital story, aside from a deep breath in the introductory seconds of the digital story and quieted breaths toward the end. Along with text transitioning in the initial minute and a half of the almost five-minute video, she shows video footage of various meaningful parts of her life and work. The opening photo encompasses three rocks with one citing, “generate”. A poster of “young African Nova Scotian leaders” graces the screen, along with books from local authors and African artifacts. Handcrafted pictures of statements like “Black Lives Matter” and framed quotes like “one day at a time” and “love grows here” appear in the story.

Sylvia speaks about teamwork and leadership as a Black woman in her digital story: “Work together, find your own stories. Black women leading, supporting each other. Learning our roles, performing the nuanced dance for policy change”. Sylvia continues with “thriving in the future. Making structures that work for us. Finding our voice together”, complemented by a photo of a group of African Canadian women in public service (Digital Story).

Chanae narrates in her digital story that university was a site of awakening for her: It wasn't until my early university years that I stood unapologetically in the full and complete truth of my Blackness. University was the awakening to my self-proclaimed racial advocate, and where I began to speak up and out on the injustices that people of colour experience.

The digital stories created by the co-researchers all tell a story of one's ability to define, name, create, and speak for themselves: Kujichugulia. This has enabled co-researchers to keep striving forward even amid their traumas. Each of the digital stories offered a demonstration of how their ability to practice Kujichugulia has attributed to their perseverance, despite feelings of defeat and humiliation. In the digital stories, co-researchers also shared educative facts and information through graphics, charts, statistics, and quotes. Some of these quotes were in fact self-authored, such as one by Angee that she shares in her digital story:

“Opinions are like apples; some are rotten- don't eat rotten apples!” -Angee ,
(Digital Story).

A large aspect of Kujichugulia and resilience alike is the ability to have critical hope that despite the hardships, injustices, and inequities that exist, there is power in choosing to see the glass half full. Co-researchers tell viewers through their digital stories that they have hope for not only themselves, but those like them in their community; the ANS community. Chanae shares

some of what drives her as it relates to her own life, but also to those coming up after her: “I tried to be relatable so that Black youth can see themselves in leadership roles to feel empowered and take control and set the trajectory of where they want to go” (Digital Story).

Proving others wrong; developing self-love and self-worth; gaining more knowledge of culture and heritage; and challenging stereotypes were all noted ways in which Kujichugulia was showcased through the digital stories. A continued repetition of “Can’t stop me” was used by co-researcher Jermal to articulate this throughout his digital story: “Said I’d never play X football... you can’t stop me... so we won the damn championship...because they can’t stop me” (Digital Story).

Additionally, Nicole spoke to the importance of younger ANSs understanding their worth and being prepared to experience anti-Black racism in their lives: “As a young Black woman, I am navigating many spaces. Spaces that all intertwine to show how my experiences with racism and racial discrimination affect how I move as a Black woman.” (Digital Story). Chanae also reminds herself as she concludes her digital story, “I know my capabilities even if others don’t see it. I will prove them wrong. I owe it to the entire African Nova Scotian community because if not me, then who? Because I am not wrong- it is a big deal, and this is my truth” (Digital Story). A woman with headphones on, silencing outside noise, with her hands behind her head in a relaxing position on the coach, wraps up the rollercoaster of emotions that Chanae has demonstrated through her digital story. Her digital story concludes with two separate clips of another Black woman holding a cardboard sign with one saying, “I am powerful”, and the other, “I am capable” (Digital Story).

Some other coping strategies identified by co-researchers included listening to music, which is also highlighted in this study in two of the co-researchers' digital stories. Popular and

influential Black musicians such as Michael Jackson, Nipsey Hussle, and Kanye West are referenced in one way or another in two digital stories. Sylvia concludes her video with a simple four words, “Standing strong; being present” (Digital Story), while a photo of her smiling bright and standing strong graces the screen and an uplifting song begins to play. The word “education” is repeated three times as the video fades to black. When used, music is an essential part of the digital story. This work provided co-researchers with a deeper understanding of race-based trauma and its impact. This will be demonstrated through the following sub-theme: “Renewed Awareness”.

Renewed Awareness. Participating in the DST process facilitated the opportunity for co-researchers to increase and renew their understanding of race-based trauma and the impact of it on the individual, as well as on the collective. Co-researchers acknowledged that the impact of trauma can be experienced when racial assaults are made directly on the individual, as well as when it is experienced indirectly through witnessing or learning about an incident of race-based trauma.

Vicarious trauma is a noteworthy phenomenon, as it did surface through this research study. It is important to acknowledge the responses to trauma that people of African descent may have while witnessing or listening to the stories and responses to those stories by others. Recalling a story can bring about many different emotions for the individual who is telling it, which can be expressed through body language, gestures, voice tone and volume, and the physical elements of emotion, such as tears. For those witnessing and/or listening to these stories, similar responses can be evoked out of empathy and compassion felt for those sharing or reliving their own personal, similar experiences.

This was also observed through outward expressions of emotions such as tears, specifically in the DST sharing session after digital stories were shared. Chanae stated while observing tears from other co-researchers: “Yeah, [my partner] already shared this with like 20 different people and they [my partner] said [a viewer] cried, too, when they [the viewer] watched.” (DST Workshop #3)

Jermal also noted learnings he gained from the DST process:

You just get so stuck in the rat race and you kind of forget that you know what? I have accomplished a few things and it’s just nice to give myself a pat on the back really and motivation, too, because often times it feels like you’re just spinning your tires and not going anywhere. But it’s like, you know what? I am making progress- small incremental changes over a short amount of time. So, it’s kind of nice. (DST Workshop #3)

Co-researchers also shared feedback about what each other’s digital stories expressed well. Along with carrying a load of caution, compound impact was something that LaMeia noted about Nicole’s digital story:

By presenting both situations- like one in work and one personal, like in terms of the shopping experience- like, just I feel like a compound because it's like you're having all these experiences at work and then you're going shopping or doing your life things and then this is happening to you when you're in the mall. So, I kind of like that you chose to present both of those things and kind of brought into reality as to like, how much [we deal with]. You could have been coming home from your day at work to go pick up something at the mall to wear to work, and then there’s more of this on top of that. So, I felt like there was a compound impact that really resonated. (DST Workshop #3)

Angee added:

I think it does a really good job of showing that layered effect too, right? [...] It's inescapable and I think that crossover of those dimensions, they just... they crash... they collide like all the time. Like, there's no separation. I had a conversation recently with a prof of mine and I said, you know, if I could just separate me from being a Black woman for about a month, I could get some sh*t done, right? So, I think actually being able to see that in your video, it really brought that home for me, anyways. And I do feel that I think, you know, just sitting there, you can't escape it. It really brought that, you know, those worlds that are always meshing. (DST Workshop #3)

Co-researchers naturally held principles of trauma stewardship, as they so generously provided emotional care to their fellow co-researchers of this study during the DST process. As well, as advocates for social justice and social change, co-researchers demonstrated through their digital stories the desire to help others who may be experiencing similar experiences.

The following theme is categorized as: "Digitizing the Story". This theme will describe how co-researchers made their stories digital using various technological features, along with having an appreciation for the development of new technological skills.

Digitizing the Story

This theme will help readers understand how oral stories of experiences can become digital projects that tell a story from the owner of that story's perspective. Co-researchers of this study learned new technological skills to create a visual story inclusive of several special technological effects. This theme presents some of the choices of special effects that co-

researchers made when creating their digital stories and is categorized under subthemes: “Use of Technological Feature” and “Development of New Technological Skills”.

Use of Technological Features

There are several technological features that make a digital story. Choices of what features and special effects to include in one’s design that compliment the story they are telling is an important part of the DST process and digital story, alike. Chanae shared her thought process in thinking about and creating her digital story:

I wanted the imagery or the videos to kind of align with what I was saying. So, I kept pausing my story and like sentence by sentence was just putting it into the search engine [of WeVideo] to find clips that sort of align. The biggest one that I kept putting was Black woman in despair. I tried to align them with the emotions. And then obviously, when the story changes and I started talking about us being a resilient people, I forgot I was going to change the music, but I felt that the music still worked really well. So, I didn't change it and kept that same sort of sad kind of music but also showing the woman at the end with words, holding up those signs of being capable and being powerful and reminding yourself of that. (DST Workshop #3)

It is important to acknowledge the background music that the co-researchers chose to use throughout their digital stories. Light upbeat instrumentals were common when there was narration that included positive aspects to one’s life story, such as being loved by their family or community. As well, when speaking about what steps they have taken to fight against anti-Black racism, co-researchers chose instrumental music that sounded uplifting. Contrarily, when discussing the experiences of anti-Black racism and negative feelings that resulted from these

experiences, the sound effects and instrumentals used were blunt, dark, jarring, and rapid paced creating an obvious disruption or interruption within the story.

Transitions in one digital story are stark, representing graphic elements to create a resemblance of a black hole. While this visual transition is happening in the digital story, Angee recalls flashbacks of unpleasant memories during their childhood while at school in her narration: “I was in grade three the first time this white boy said this to me. He said, ‘Woolly Mammoth’. And I was so confused because I didn’t understand why he was so fixated on my hair.”– (Digital Story). She follows this by listing in text, the many names that she has been called throughout her years in school, in addition to ‘Woolly Mammoth’, all with racist motive. An audio clip of children making noise to the effect of a recess break on the playground is used in the background while we see: “Kezzy, Kunta Kinte, N*****, Nappy Head, Tangee.” - Digital Story.

Jermal chose to use a reoccurring photo of a stop sign with the graffiti writing, “can’t stop me!”, which countered experiences of being told what he “could not” do within school, athletics, and professional endeavors. He continues with personal photos of him throughout his life reaching milestones. Jermal narrates: “to dinners with the Prime Minister”, as a photo of him and Prime Minister Stephen Harper appear in the digital story. This is followed by “still can’t stop me, the marathon continues”, a phrase coined by an influential rap artist, the late Nipsey Hussle, while the photo transitions back to a personal one of him while he speaks. The instrumental music is upbeat and cheerful. He continues this pattern: “Said I wouldn’t graduate high school... can’t stop me”, and “said I wouldn’t graduate university...you can’t stop me!”. His choice of personal photos complements both statements most authentically with a photo of

himself in his high school graduation cap and gown, and then in his university graduation gown receiving his degree.

Similarly, along the same theme of being told one could not do something, Chanae's digital story describes the challenges she faced as a youth growing up in a predominantly white environment and lacking a sense of belonging. She sets the scene of a Black child in a group of all white children and a clip of a Black girl, who intentionally resembles the co-researcher, over which she speaks about her responsibilities as an ANS woman. The instrumental music is a slow tempo, and her tone of voice sounds weary. Drawing upon her experiences in childhood into her teenage years, she tells the stories of being told that she would not be able to achieve certain things. In her digital story, she showcases a photo of a young Black woman in a university graduation cap and gown, while saying that it was in university, "where I learned to speak up and out on the injustices that people of colour experience". (Digital Story).

Co-researchers described the turning points in their lives when anti-Black racism began to challenge them inwardly. Angee uses metaphoric phrasing: "Who am I and who blew out my candles?", over the sound of a piano being played in a soft sequence of notes and a photo of her as a young girl blowing out candles on a birthday cake transitions on the screen (Digital Story). Nicole chose a stock photo of a Black person in a group of many white folks, over which she states: "In my personal spaces and in workspaces, I was present when people felt the need to come to me to tell me the quote-on-quote Black joke" (Digital Story). She follows this statement with how she was made to feel in these moments using white text on a black screen: "othered, singled out, awkward" (Digital Story). Chanae chose a video clip of a young Black girl in a group of white peers who appears to be ignored as she is speaking. over the video Chanae says:

“As a young Black girl going through the education system in predominantly white schools, I rarely saw people that looked like me who shared similar experiences or demonstrated the same values.”

In her digital story, LaMeia also used white text on a black screen to share parts of her story. She writes: “Something happened to me” in white letters on a black background. She follows it with, “I can’t believe this happened” and it is followed by another transitional text that gets gradually bigger: “I can’t believe this shit is STILL happening”.

This theme, outlining the use of technological features through WeVideo, the online video editor that co-researchers used to create their digital stories, makes the connection of subsequent themes in acknowledging how co-researchers chose to explore and express those themes in their digital stories. While common themes were identified in the context of the digital stories, there were also common patterns in the use of technology and choices of text, tone, and imagery embedded within the digital stories. Co-researchers stayed consistent with their initial digital story goals as stated above. There was also consistency in how co-researchers chose to share their experiences with the group, including with syntax, tone of voice when used, choice of words, and parts of experiences expressed through narration and imagery. Moreover, while experiences of anti-Black racism were varied and different, there were more commonalities identified in how the trauma of such experiences manifested within co-researchers’ lives, and further, how their quality of life has been impacted.

Development of New Technological Skills. While some co-researchers had experience with participatory research methods and methodologies previously, DST was a new process for all co-researchers. The group had varying levels of experience with technology, video creation, and editing software. WeVideo, a program referenced by Lang et al. (2019), was a new video editing website for all co-researchers. It was expressed that there was a level of ease in using the *WeVideo* free online video editor, which provided several different effects that could be used in the digital stories. DST Workshop #2 provided a training on how to use the software along with the free components that could be used in the creation of one's digital story. These included image and video clips; audio and instrumentals; and transitional and text-based features. Although assistance was available for co-researchers in completing their digital stories, all were able to create their digital stories on their own without the assistance of the doctoral researcher of this study. This is telling of how user-friendly *WeVideo* is for beginners.

Angee explained what was helpful for her while using the *WeVideo* program in the second workshop:

So, what I started doing was I created the video first, like all the pictures. And then I started talking to myself as I was watching it go, like describing it. And then I went back and hit the record button. And when I got enough that I wanted to say about that [I stopped], because I didn't try to do the whole thing at once. [...] It's actually five clips of it. It's [WeVideo] really user friendly, I will say that.

Chanae stated:

Yeah, once I figured out how to actually use the platform, I completely erased everything that I first had and was like, now I can see these videos and type in actions that I wanted to resonate. So, I typed in like Black Woman in despair and a lot of different clips kind of

came up. And the one when the white woman is in the bathroom with her, like while she's crying, she actually does end up helping her, but I cut it all so that it looks like she's just walking in, like looks over and continues doing what she's doing because that's what it feels like, you know? (DST Workshop #3)

During DST Workshop #2, we discussed the concept of storytelling as part of crafting the story. Co-researchers shared what they had done so far in preparing for the digital story. Chanae, for example, explained, "I have to write and come back to it, so I know that's what my process is. I've just sort of been brainstorming key themes that I really wanted to touch on in the story". - (DST Workshop #2). LaMeia also shared "It's something that is going to be sound and visuals. I don't know if there will be much talking... [...] it will be like... kind of having to be interpreted". (DST Workshop #2)

As a group, we discussed at great lengths the technology that we would use to create the digital stories. In depth discussion about the use of music was had, as well as an opportunity to share feedback about the *WeVideo* software, as referenced by co-researchers Angee and Chanae. We also strategized how to co-create various ideas that co-researchers expressed; however, not everyone necessarily knew how to showcase their ideas digitally. Nicole contemplated in the first DST workshop:

I don't really know exactly what one [experience] or kind of how I want it to look in terms of telling your story. But I guess my story... I wanted to show how we navigate with so many extra layers as Black, for myself, as a Black woman, and I guess there's so many different experiences that tie into how I carry myself in different spaces.

With discussions about what to include in digital stories and use of technology, Lambert (2010) describes the element of the narrated voiceover in the digital story, which differs from the

written story in that it cannot be constructed in sentence and paragraph form. Rather, a digital story involves short sentences, stand-alone phrases, and edifying comments. Co-researchers understood this and noted their process in the final DST workshop: Chanae shared, “Mine is actually filmed in sections but you wouldn’t notice.” Nicole also explained:

I just started talking and then I wanted the word or the pictures to go along with what I was saying [...] and then I was like, oh, the music sounds pretty cool and then I just kind of played around with some of the different things (DST Workshop #3). Jermal commented that he was able to include about “70 per cent of what I wanted to portray in the way that I wanted to portray it” (DST Workshop #3). DST is different from conventional oral storytelling in an important way, with oral versions being modified every time the story is told, emphasizing various aspects according to the audience or mood of the storyteller. This could mean adding details, expounding upon, or leaving things out. Nicole also explained:

I just wanted to show that as well as life continues [by using] the trains and know that it’s not a stop. [...] This is just a moment, and your life is just continually moving. I want to show that we have to continue with the things that have happened, and we have to continue. (DST Workshop #3)

While co-researchers spoke of the opportunities to learn new technology, there were also some challenges identified. The video creation and editing software, *WeVideo*, was new for all co-researchers. All but one co-researcher identified to be in the beginner/intermediate range for having some skills in utilizing editing software. It was identified that *WeVideo* itself did pose some challenges for co-researchers in creating their videos. Jermal shared: “The system itself [WeVideo], I found kind of hard to put my voice in certain spots, as well” –DST Workshop #3. He also expressed that it was challenging to record: “I found it hard to record – it took like 5-6

different times to get the sound right” – DST Workshop #3. Others agreed that it took many attempts to get their digital stories how they desired them to be using the multi-media elements.

For example, Chanae explains:

I found that part challenging, too- trying to say all that I needed to say and get it to flow and sound good [...]. It took me a while to figure out the features. (DST Workshop #3)

Additionally, co-researchers explained their choices for the design of their digital stories.

Specifically, Jermal says:

So, I always wanted [...] to start it off with [a particular song] just because that was one of my personal and favourite pump-up songs. [...] I wanted to use photos from my youth to present day, but that didn't work out as I had planned, so the photos I used were selected based on my camera roll. The first picture, I believe, is like 1998 or 99 until 2022. And the sounds explain around halfway through, I want to kind of make it happy- kind of switched the tone from like the “you can't stop” to “I'm like, you know what is achievable”. Then that's kind of where I had errors in trying to portray what I wanted to by using the tech. I couldn't place things in the right spot when I tried to transition to music and narrative like that as well. (DST Workshop #3)

Interestingly, all participants showcased in their final digital stories what they discussed as their goal for their digital story during workshops #1 and #2. While all co-researchers were uncertain of how their digital stories would piece together during the workshops, the core ideas that they shared were reflected in their final pieces.

During the third and final DST workshop, the sharing session, the following questions were asked to co-researchers, similar to an exit interview, to understand their experiences participating in the DST process:

1. How was this DST experience for you?
2. What new learnings/awareness, if any, do you have?
3. What do you want to do with your individual DST or the collective beyond this thesis?
4. What are your hopes for your DST regarding cultural and race-based trauma?
5. Where do you think your DST could be used further?

All co-researchers spoke of their appreciation for this opportunity, and that it exceeded their expectations, due to DST being a foreign concept to them when they agreed to participate.

Jermal indicated that he would be interested in participating in more opportunities: “I think it would be cool to do like a part two or later, like the next ten years from now. I’m gonna continue on with it [his own practice of DST].” (DST Workshop #3)

All co-researchers were pleased with their final digital stories. Sylvia expressed contentment with hers, as well as the desire to enhance her story minimally to make it feel more complete:

I feel like there’s gaps to fill in, in a way. I have all these things that are in my mind that should be there [in my digital story]. I don’t know how immediate that would be, but I do think it would help string it together more strongly to kind of see some of those things that were there[in my experiences]. (DST Workshop #3)

Chanae was pleasantly surprised by her final product and expressed an abundance of pride in what she had created: “I did not expect me to put something so vulnerable like into a video” [...] (DST Workshop #3). She intentionally chose not to include personal identifying photos, videos, or information that would reveal who she was and rather, opted to use stock

photos, videos, and graphics. She had some uncertainty about how the digital story would turn out, given that it did not seem as though it would be as personalized as many that we had viewed as samples were. She did choose to use her voice to narrate her story alongside the stock images and videos, and additionally decided to include her name at the end:

So the only reason why I put my name at the end is because I actually liked what I came up with [...] Initially it [the digital story] was all stills [photos], and then when I realized the [WeVideo] components and how they all kind of blended together, I was like, “oh, this looks way better” so I actually paid for it to get it [the types of video clips used] because I felt like it deserved that.’ (DST Workshop #3)

Gubrium, et al. (2013) remind us that the digital stories belong to those who have created them. Co-researchers have the liberty of using and sharing their own stories how they desire. Chanae began sharing her story more widely across social media platforms because of the positive feedback that she continued to receive when sharing with the research group and within her own circles of support. It is important to highlight that when we conducted the screening interview as referenced above, she was initially not willing or ready to be identified with her story in any capacity. The DST process of sharing one’s story with the research group, crafting the story through script and storyboarding, and then sharing the final digital story with the research group and trusted supports, contributed to their desire to share beyond the group. Chanae proclaimed: “I do plan to share it publicly after. I wasn’t gonna but like I said, I really liked it”. (Chanae, DST Workshop #3)

Gubrium et al. (2013) contend that ongoing communication or check-ins with co-researchers by the primary researcher are crucial to DST as a research methodology. Chanae

shared that she has continuously been receiving positive feedback from people viewing her video:

I really had no idea kind of where I was going with it. But after [my partner] seen it, he was like, wow. Like he came home and brought me flowers and everything because he was like, 'I didn't realize like, how much affected, obviously, you have been like by all of this, and you put your heart directly with that video' and he's like, 'you can't not, show that. It's you that wrote this and said this story'. So that's why I put at the end written and narrated by myself so that people could see because I didn't choose to use any of my own personal videos or images and things. (DST Workshop #3)

This is yet another testament to the effectiveness of DST as a research methodology. This leads into the following section in which I will speak about the benefits of the DST process that co-researchers identified. Through the three DST workshops, the one-on-one session and check-ins, and by way of creating their digital stories, the co-researchers found the overall DST process to be a positive experience. This theme will be further broken down into sub-themes: "Peer, group, and communal support" and "Healing Nature of DST".

Benefits of DST Process

There were numerous benefits that were identified by co-researchers in each of the workshops during the DST process. Peer, group, and communal support; and healing nature of the DST process.

Peer, group, and communal support. The DST workshops phase of this research study invited co-researchers to gather both in person and virtually on three different occasions. While some co-researchers knew each other from previous encounters, there were some co-researchers who did not know everyone in the group. This process fostered the opportunity for new connections amongst co-researchers and the building of relationships. Allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with people that we do not necessarily know also speaks to the natural source of empowerment that the collective identity brings to a process, specifically with people of African descent. LaMeia made reference to this when speaking about showing her digital story to the group:

[I wondered] what's it going to be like to show this to people like, 'Oh, I'm just taking you on a tour of my surroundings', but I really wanted to kind of bring you all in, in a way that felt very intimate in the sense that I've come to know you, folks. – (DST Workshop #3)

One of the most appreciative components of the DST process expressed by co-researchers was the opportunity to come together as a group of ANS people, in a culturally safe place, to talk about the issues that impact their lives. Angee shared her reflections at the second DST workshop after having attended the first DST workshop the week prior:

Actually, I went home and throughout the week, I just kind of did a test run on this program [WeVideo]. I was motivated to just do it right, and to just get it done because not often do we experience these safe spaces either where we're able to just sit here and talk like this and just be validated, and not people just meeting. I think the most valuable thing for me is being able to listen, being able to talk, be understood. And that's all that needs to be said, right. But last week and coming today, knowing that there's almost like

this level of comfort, right- you're calm when you know that. Because for me, someone who struggles with mental health issues as a result of race trauma, whenever I'm going out into the world, there's a checklist that checks off mentally in my head and emotionally. And sometimes I get to the bottom and say, you're not going there- like because there's too many variables like... did you have enough rest? Are you ready? Are you prepared? Is the space safe and what's the topic? But none of those things were necessary to show up in this space because it's a safe space in that regard. But I think that was really important for me to participate in these things, especially. So, I feel really safe in this space. (DST Workshop #2)

Collective discussions, storytelling, and supporting and affirming one another in those stories has been found to be a source of empowerment for the co-researchers. LaMeia contributed in response to Nicole's digital story sharing:

I feel like there was also this questioning [of racism], which speaks to the need for us to always kind of have space for each other to kind of have the abilities to decompress from, somewhere. That inspired me to think about how important it is for us to be having more of those discussions and conversations. (DST Workshop #3)

When co-researchers provided feedback to one another, they were validating each other's experiences, as well as offering support emotionally, psychologically, and physically through nods in agreement, offerings of a tissue, a gentle touch on the shoulder, or a consensual hug. During the third DST Workshop, when digital stories were shared, the support was amplified through a multitude of emotions. For example, Sylvia offered these words with her voice trembling and with tears in her eyes: "That was like so amazing. Of course, I'm not

surprised because you are so amazing. Like to both of you [co-researchers who had shared their stories so far]” (DST Workshop #3). After Chanae said that she would be publicly sharing her digital story, LaMeia added:

You can [go public]. I think it's really important that you do because I think of like... you can't stop me. Like it's so important to have that kind of vibe in this. And I think that even to you, like when you do something that you don't think you can do, then you see that you can't even stop yourself. So, you're like, now something deeper inside of you is coming out, saying, I want to speak now. And so, I think that it really resonates with the videos that we've seen. I mean, and I know all our videos are going to have a coming together vibe, you know, like because of the content that we're dealing with. Our styles are all different and I think that's also really cool that we all have our own way of coming at our videos. (DST Workshop #3)

There was also an element of encouragement from one another to share and share with pride. After seeing Chanae's video, co-researcher Nicole stated: “I don't even want to share mine”, with a smile and acknowledging how heartfelt Chanae's video was. LaMeia responded to Nicole's comment with: “don't feel like you don't want to share yours, Nicole. Everybody's videos are going to be different”. However, during our final sharing session, Nicole said:

I feel like all of the videos so far, they really draw you in because I have a problem with attention [...]. I've been watching the videos and when LaMeia was like [at the] four, forty-four [mark in the digital story], and I'm like [to myself], “Oh, that's gonna be long”. And then I was sitting there, and the video was over and like everybody's videos have gone so quick, but I feel like they're just like captivating. When Jermal stopped his video, I was like [to myself] “Oh, I want to see more” because I was into everything going on.

And everybody draws you into this story and you really feel what the person has to say.

(DST Workshop #3)

All digital stories were very well-received by one another, and co-researchers were excited to discuss next steps.

The next theme discusses the healing nature of the DST process, as well as the digital story.

The Healing Nature of DST Process

Co-researchers identified a therapeutic element to the DST process that was described as being healing. Angee affirmed this at the close of the first DST Workshop:

Honestly, I was going to say this to be honest. This was actually pretty therapeutic to sit in a room with Black people and share Black stories. And, for the same reason why I said I wanted to share my story, you [another co-researcher] want to share. Like, for the same reason we all want to share our stories is what just happened in this room tonight. Like, we felt everyone's stories and could be in those little spaces, and that was valuable. Like, honestly, I had a crappy day. I had a real bad day, and racism was racism as it is most days, but today was racisiming just a little bit more. (DST Workshop #1),

Being able to honestly and vulnerably share what has assisted co-researchers throughout their lives was a contributing piece to the therapeutichealing nature that this research process offered.

Angee explained:

But it just goes again, like, I can't express enough the value of just being... Like you [co-researcher] talked about at the barbershop- just being with Black people in a Black space and safely sharing your Black experiences, and being validated, right, and not feeling like

you're going crazy- like I gotta minimize and I gotta shrink. Girl, go into that role with your whole chest out. So, thank you [for this session]. (DST Workshop #1)

LaMeia also named it in the final workshop: “There is just something really happening healing-wise for me here tonight.” She says:

I really challenged myself to actually be more present with myself because I am somebody who likes to labour over the visuals and make sure it's perfect. And so, I actually kind of went with just giving myself a half hour to just get it done so that I can actually be present. I could have been all day and I'm a filmmaker, so I could have been all day in doing this. But I actually really wanted to challenge myself by doing something really raw and vulnerable and in the moment and something very present because I've been kind of finding that being present helps me with the overwhelm of doing it. And I just feel proud that I actually did it, and that it ended up being four-four -four [video time]. Like it stopped right at four-four-four [the video time] as I chunked it together. But just to say that like, you know, the creative process in this is just as much a part of the process in talking about it to you, right. (DST Workshop #13)

Nicole also commented on how she felt following the first session:

I really, really enjoyed it and I was looking forward to coming back and just like, the safe space. I enjoyed the company, and the conversations are really good and different conversations that, you know, I don't interact with these people all the time. So, I thought it was really beneficial and I felt like, ok, let's do this. (DST Workshop #2)

Sylvia talked about her faith in the first workshop, her digital story, and in the third workshop when describing her digital story:

The picture where we're on the stage- that is like where we were, like the band... the little family band that used to go around singing in the churches, right, for church events and for Christmas. So, it was like, our faith and being together- that's what kept us all together, right, traveling around and then doing things. (DST Workshop #3)

Additionally, being provided the opportunity to give oneself permission to be vulnerable when they did not even know they had it in them was noted. For example, Chanae expressed: "I guess what I've learned is I can be vulnerable. But I didn't think it was in me, but I guess it is". (DST Workshop #3)

This is consistent with what co-researchers identified as being crucial when asked "how do you show up in the world?" at the first DST workshop, and what they named as supports as discussed above. Jermal and Sylvia shared specifically about their faith. For example, Jermal says: "I am a follower of a higher power. Who that is, I get to decide. [...] but I believe in a higher power." (DST Workshop #1). While Sylvia expressed:

I mean, for me, I show up in terms of my church and my faith. That's really always grounding for me, and I'm always happy to talk about it. But I don't feel like I need to talk about it all the time, either. I just want to kind of live it and walk. (DST, Workshop #1)

Nicole stated:

There's an endless amount of role models that I have in my family and greater community. And in relationships that I've built over being in different areas, whether that's work and school, in trying to grow a business, and just my personal relationships. And yeah, I think I really rely on my support system for my challenges. (DST Workshop #1)

LaMeia referenced her own healing journey that had begun prior to participating in this study and a past self-analysis activity through way of a mirror, which was so impactful to her that she chose to bring it into her digital story:

That [past] mirror exercise really helped me with my process of healing. And I kind of find myself looking in the mirror often and having that true reflection back of myself and loving myself and loving where I'm at in my healing journey. So, I ended it in the mirror because I felt that it was really important to kind of, for me, to see that and then also to kind of show that, that's a constant mirror. They're a constant in my life, I guess in terms of I'm always looking in the mirror. (DST Workshop #3)

Summary of Themes

DST as a methodology makes for a comprehensive research process. Co-researchers must invest themselves mentally, emotionally, and physically by being present in finding, telling, crafting and sharing their story. All phases of the DST process, including the workshops, one-on-one sessions and the creation of the digital stories; are crucial parts of the research process. Several themes were identified during the DST workshops and within the digital stories, which were discussed throughout this chapter. There were many overlapping themes identified between the DST process and the digital stories, as a product of the method. Parallels were drawn between the importance of one's Indigenous ANS holistic identity, with emphasis being placed on family and community. Additionally, the recognition of one's coping, resilience, and self-determination, or Kujichugulia, was central to the findings. Commonalities between co-researchers proved to be evident in the types of experiences of anti-Black racism shared; trauma responses to such experiences; means of coping and identifying support; and how co-researchers articulated this in their digital stories. The use of varying technological features, through

WeVideo, was found to be useful, as well as user friendly with co-researchers commenting on the new technological and editing skills that they obtained through this process. Co-researchers were openly vulnerable in their sharing of stories; however, expressed feeling comfortable and safe to do so, acknowledging the peer, group, and communal support of people. It was identified that the DST process facilitated a therapeutic environment that co-researchers deeply benefitted from. Viewing the digital stories as a final piece was also noted to be therapeutic. Though experiences recalled were painful to relive, co-researchers found their strength in telling their stories as well as affirming the strengths of each other in doing same. Despite the unjust and hurtful reality of living in a society that others and excludes people of African descent, co-researchers proved that we have been here, and we belong. Resilience and self-determination, or *Kujichugulia*, continue to outweigh feelings of defeat and discouragement along the life journey.

Co-researchers expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in such a study and shared their excitement about continuing the work and further developing their digital stories. While there were only six co-researchers reflected in this study, the literature exploring the health implications of anti-Black race trauma tells a similar story to those shared by co-researchers. An intergenerational analysis revealed the importance of cultural identity and that while there were some differences in the ways that anti-Black racism was experienced, in most cases, the stories dating decades back are the same stories being written in present day.

To build on these identified themes, I will explore my own personal reflections in a subsequent concluding chapter. Personal reflections were captured by way of field notes and debriefing processes for myself, the doctoral researcher, post the DST workshops.

The next chapter will provide an analysis of the findings presented above.

Chapter 5: Analysis & Discussions

The previous chapter presented themes that were identified in addressing the research question of this study. Through the DST process, which included three workshops as well as the creation of the digital stories, the co-researchers shared several experiences of the trauma of anti-Black racism. Participatory research methods including DST have been found to be well suited for conducting research with racialized and vulnerable groups, including Indigenous African Nova Scotians.

This chapter will present an analysis of the findings outlined in Chapter 4. There will be discussion around the key themes, woven in with supporting literature and the theories that make up the theoretical framework. The chapter will be categorized into sections: breaking down the chronicity of anti-Black racism; impact of race-based trauma on health, exclusion, and othering; racial battle fatigue; taking action against assault; theory and practice: the healing nature of the DST process, new technology, and vicarious trauma and trauma stewardship.

Breaking Down the Chronicity of Anti-Black Racism

To understand AT, PTSS theory, and CRT as a framework guiding this study, I breakdown and unpack the construct of anti-Black racism. Bowden and Buie (2021) write that racism is an “insidious, multifarious social disease” (p. 760). Dei and Howell Rutherford (2023) differentiate between anti-Black racism and anti-African racism. They state that anti-Black racism is centred on the devaluing, othering, and exoticism of the rich ethnocultural elements of African language, folklore, spirituality, and geographies with skin colour being the main reason for this. Anti-African racism draws attention to the ideals of legitimacy, civility, worthiness, and

morality, which would be valued in an African culture but de-valued in a Eurocentric culture.

What is similar about these two concepts is that both have been constructed by white supremacist ideologies.

Dumas (2016) argues that:

antiblackness does not signify a mere racial conflict that might be resolved through organized political struggle and appeals to the state and to the citizenry for redress.

Instead, antiblackness marks an irreconcilability between the Black and any sense of social or cultural regard. 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)

As noted in the previous chapter, co-researchers described experiences of anti-Black racism during their early schooling years. Scholars have explored anti-Black racism within education (Bernard & Smith, 2018; Codjoe, 2001; James, 2022; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond 2018; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Maynard, 2017; Schroeter & James, 2015), while others (Dei & Howell Rutherford, 2023) discuss anti-Black racism in the specific context of schools referring to culture, climate, and environment. As found in this study, and in the literature, anti-Black racism has been perpetuated within the education system through, for example, a lack of representation in administration and teaching staff, resources and curriculum. The disregard of different worldviews, values rooted in collectivism, informal learning, and skill development provides an internal dilemma for students of African descent who foster their sense of identity in Africentricity.

Dei and Howell Rutherford (2023) challenge the way forward by considering decolonization to repair the harms that have been caused by colonization and deep manipulation

of the Black psyche. The pushing out of Black children or “systemic evacuation” (p. 35) is an example of how anti-Black racism manifests within the education system. As well, the funnelling out of academic pathways is a common experience in Nova Scotia (Boudreau, 2015). Sylvia provided an example of reacting in a physical way to a white boy pulling the bows off her church dress on the first day of school. The church dress as is a nuanced symbol of culture, values and tradition. Sunday church clothes have historically been considered one’s “good” set of clothes in the ANS community which in some cases, children would be allowed to wear on the first day of school because it was considered a special occasion. Considering the consequences of actions involved in the encounter, Sylvia was disciplined for her role in the conflict at school however, he was not. Further, she speaks about the complexities of parenting and protection within the Black family specifically during her upbringing at a time when the voices of women were silenced in many ways.

Consistent with the literature, the findings of this research study suggest that representation and challenging the anti-Black racist systems, practices, attitudes, and beliefs contribute to decolonization of the education system. The education system is the primary site where co-researchers described experiencing anti-Black racism over their lives. Jermal spoke specifically about his experiences with low expectations placed on him in education, athletics, and professionalism in his digital story. His theme of “can’t stop me” symbolizes his ability to resist and counter the stereotypical narratives that he was subjected to. Chanae also speaks to her preparation in life to be able to respond constructively to anti-Black racism through her community upbringing, and professional opportunities providing training and professional development. Working in the field of education exposed her to the ways in which people have had to negotiate their identities contingent on the spaces that they were in at any given time. Her

commitment to AT and CRT from an insider perspective working within Black organizations under Africentric governance, provided her a level of protection from the oppressive working environments and systems that many Black people must work within. This level of protection changed when she began working within a Eurocentric organization under white leadership. She describes that even with the knowledge that she had gained over time along with a strong cultural identity, when forced to navigate her identity on an everyday basis, her “light began to dim”.

Angee provided an example of the impact that she can see her digital story having:

I want little Black girls to be seen for who they are, as they are. That they are enough.

Like, you know, not to say that that can stop someone's trauma, but I certainly know that seeing yourself, you know, that representation and seeing your story and it being validated, it can certainly lessen the pain that others may carry, or choose to, not choose to but to endure. (DST Workshop #2)

As an educational tool, DST can play a role in decolonization through challenging limited understandings of anti-Black racism trauma as a real, valid, and what Sederstrom and Lasege (2022) name, a chronic condition. They explain that:

Anti-Black racism has caused Black people in the United States of America to live under conditions that can be synonymous with being born with a preexisting condition that has direct impact on one's health status and treatment outcomes. (p. S25)

While this is a concept related to the public healthcare system, the chronicity of anti-Black racism is a condition experienced at all intersections of society for Black people including African Canadian and African Nova Scotian people. For example, LaMeia states:

I think too, like the variety of ways that we are creating digital stories [...], because again, how much Canadian content is in the context of digital stories as a research methodology? So, I think it would be nice to have our stories documented as like, these [...] Black Canadian stories. (DST Workshop #3)

LaMeia adds:

Maybe even like find opportunities to kind of put [the digital stories] out there, too, you know, because I think that's another opportunity that you have as a researcher [...] like the Human Rights Commission [...] there may be some particular organizations and folks that could hear these stories. (DST Workshop #3)

She sets the stage for macro level study application seeking to inform public policy which aligns with CRT's tenant of the "idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling" (Hartlep, 2009, p. 6).

While each of tenet of CRT is crucial, "without CRT's counter-storytelling, the true stories would never be publicly proclaimed, and perhaps the world would come to believe and perceive that all was fine" (Hartlep, 2009, p.11).

Co-researchers spoke to the importance of representation within these systems, highlighting that when it is not present, there is an urgency to address it. For example, in her digital story, Chanae says: "My experiences fueled my drive for more representation, as well as personal success". In addition, curriculum reform; bringing parents, students, and community into decision making processes; and the exploration of more Africentric school models, like Toronto's Africentric Alternative School, a publicly funded school established in 2009 in Ontario, and first of its kind (Dei & Howell Rutherford, 2023), are ways to genuinely challenge anti-Black racism in education. AT considers the centralization of the African worldview by

promoting inclusivity while CRT supports a new way of meeting the needs of various communities and their people.

Impact of race-based trauma on health

As identified by co-researchers in this study, there are significant implications on the health and well-being of ANSs because of the traumatic experiences of anti-Black racism. Letich and Sutton (2012) explore the science behind the impact of trauma on the nervous system. They state, “the neurological responses to safety and lack of it generate a cascade of neurochemicals and sensory experience (heart rate, muscle tension patterns, etc.) which is then translated into emotions and cognitions” (p. 6). When neuroscience-based self-regulation skills are practiced in our own self-care or care of others, they argue that we begin to “re-wire the nervous system for more resilience (the ability to remain in or get back into the Resilient Zone after distressing events) which, in turn, can generate entire ecosystems capable of creativity and generativity” (p. 6). Van der Klok (2014) also asserts that the body does indeed keep score of traumas endured in varying ways. PTSS has considered the negotiation of one’s identity through racist socialization and conditioning. An example of this was shared by Jermal when he describes his endurance of anti-Black racism over time:

It's like kind of like microaggressions and fly bites over time. One or two fly bites, all right, but then when your whole body is weltd, you go, yeah, that's when you start freaking out, and I was getting close to freaking out. (DST Workshop #1)

Harrell (2000) identifies six types of racism-related stressors, noting that the trauma of racism is experienced not only through direct personal experiences, but also through collective, vicarious experiences and observations. Essed (1991) argues that what may appear trivial, as individual incidents, each incident occurs in the context of a personal and collective history of

other ‘trivial’ incidents. These incidences are in the context of one’s own past experiences of racism and the experiences of friends and loved ones, as well as strangers who happen to share one’s skin colour. Such experiences accumulate over time and can cause considerable compounded distress.

It is important to acknowledge that at times, there is uncertainty about how to respond in the moment and even afterwards. Fight, flight, freeze, or fawn are all normal psychological reactions or responses to trauma (Taylor, 2022). What Nicole is describing is a freeze response where there may not be a decisive action made in that moment. Although freeze may be a response choice for one experience, one could default to any one of the four at another time. I believe these responses could be cyclical in that in the moment- one may experience one form of response, but moments or any length of time thereafter could prompt a different response.

Benton (1997) describes the evolution of “Afrikan consciousness” (pp.1-2), while focusing on the effects of R.A.C.I.S.M, which she breaks down as the: Reality of the Anger, Confusion, Isolation, and Stress, that Afrikan members in the Diaspora experience as the result of living in a racist society. Benton acknowledges the need to break the cycle of self-perpetuation of racist ideology to resist the effects of racism. The development of an Afrikan consciousness is a form of coping with racism which is influenced by the knowledge of racism (Benton, 1997). Many co-researchers speak to this directly through their digital stories referencing their ANS identity, strength and wisdom they draw from family, elders, other community members, and their ancestors.

It was argued by Kiecolt et al. (2008) that African Canadian and African American communities experience similar or lower levels of serious mental illness, compared with the mainstream population, despite higher exposure to chronic stressors such as low socioeconomic

status and racism. Co-researchers discussed the implications of experiencing anti-Black racism trauma on their mental health and well-being. Two spoke about specific diagnoses that they have received as a result such as PTSD and anxiety while others noted symptoms that have never been assessed medically. I believe that there is something to be said here about the nuances and complexities of resilience for people of African descent. Some of these nuances might appear as culturally normal such as a reliance on faith and self-help strategies as LaMeia notes or non-clinical interventions as Jermal describes with the Barbershop Talks. It is worth noting that consideration for Eurocentric-biased methods used to study mental health in the African Canadian and African American communities which can be flawed should be explored (Mouzon, 2013 as cited in Bernard et al., 2022)

The Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers conducted a study examining the intersections of anti-Black racism and ableism within the African Nova Scotian community including recent Black immigrants (Bernard et al., 2022). This participatory action-based research study explored the intersections of anti-Black racism and ableism, highlighting issues of mental illness, substance abuse, problem gambling, and (dis) Ability. Through the voices of ANS participants in the study, it was found that when effective intervention and treatment are delayed, it can result in a prolonged lack of well-being and poorer outcomes for ANSs. Effective interventions and support from family, the Black community, and spirituality were integral to the co-researchers' sense of well-being. The study also provided critical opportunities for grassroots community engagement, education, and empowerment on race and (dis)Ability issues in the province and beyond. Aligned with the framework of AT, community healing is centralized through the collective identity of Black people and relevant approaches to care are prioritized.

As discussed in the literature review in chapter two, Halloran (2019), Carlson et al. (2018), Sule et al. (2017), and Sharpe (2015) discuss the significance of PTSS and its impact on the health of African Americans. They affirm the mental harm that can result from race-based trauma, such as varying mental illness diagnoses, which is reflected in Canadian studies (Beagan, et al., 2012; Benton, 1997; Bernard et al., 2020; James et al., 2010), as well. As a theory and condition, PTSS acknowledges that adaptive practices from times of enslavement are still observed in present-day time. However, quite often, these adaptative practices are out of context, due to what one might argue as progressive changes over time, such as the abolishment of slavery. Leary (2001) discusses the “method of transmission”, from African American slaves to their offspring. She argues that while the direct trauma of slavery occurred long ago, the residual stress-related effects of slavery were passed down through generations. Leary (2001) breaks down this transmission within the family, community, and on societal levels. PTSS theory recognizes that self-destructive behaviours are symptoms of PTSD, according to the DSM. These symptoms include feelings of detachment or estrangement from others; restricted range of affect, e.g. unable to have loving feelings; irritability or outbursts of anger; unpredictable explosions of aggressive behavior; difficulty focusing; hypervigilance; and exaggerated startle response. As a result of surviving the slave experience and subsequently experiencing these symptoms, their children would have learned the behaviours and attitudes of their “injured and disturbed parents” (p. 42) through familial relationships and encounters.

While this transmission may occur, it is not always recognized or consciously perpetuated and can become the go-to responses, which favour white supremacist ideals, beliefs, and values. For example, Cormer (1980, cited in Leary, 2001, p. 42), writes that in the 1940s, unruly Black boys could be severely beaten for standing their ground with a white person in

authority. Corner (1980) contends that this Black survival was dependent on the preparation and reaction, however harmful to Black self-esteem and group esteem, and social development. In contemporary days, Leary (2001) asserts that this might look like a mother in a public or private setting conducting their business and insisting that their young children stay close and not stray. While they may be reprimanded by their mothers for straying, white children are exploring freely, which sends a message to the Black children that if they explore in the ways that the white children are, they may cause harm or trouble to their mother. Co-researchers discussed their upbringing and how they were raised by strong community advocates. For example, Sylvia reflected that she was “managed and disciplined about kind of control[ing] yourself [...] [by] my parents”, which she says was her parents’ way of protecting her. She recognizes her role in intergenerational transmission and being cautious about the patterns and behaviours that can unintentionally be passed down to the next generation.

Hair was identified as a theme by co-researchers when discussing examples of experiencing anti-Black racism. There are countless examples of people of African ancestry experiencing discrimination for wearing their hair in either its natural state or in a protective style. Historically, hair has been a notable talking piece to reference difference. Referring to Black hair in a negative way reinforces the many racial microaggressions toward Black people. Black people are persecuted for wearing their hair in its natural state or in culturally affirmed protective styles. Donahoo and Smith (2022) write that a simple google search in 2019 revealed that unprofessional hairstyles for work were associated with images of Black women with their hair style in its natural state, while professional hairstyles were images of mostly white women. They discuss the beautiful embrace of Black hair on the continent of Africa and the historical connection of Black hair and slavery noting that the negative regard of Black hair began with

white people during time of enslavement, when Black hair was described as, “unattractive, unmanageable, and unwelcome” (p. 183). In fact, certain hair textures, styles, and skin complexions more closely resembling white women afforded Black women more desirable status, such as house slaves instead of the of being in the field workers. Writers (Collier, 2012; Donahoo and Smith Thompson, 2009b; Morrison, 2010; Patton, 2006 as cited in Donahoo & Smith, 2022) have argued the advantages of wearing one’s hair straightened afforded upward mobility in life, becoming more acceptable in dominantly white spaces, and improving their social position. Citing several scholars (Collier, 2012; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Johnson, 2013), they say that this process of straightening, however, comes at cost with its potential to physically damage one’s follicles and skin, which contributes to hair loss. There are also negative effects that white beauty has had on how Black women view their hair, skin, bodies, and overall self-identity (Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Craig, 2002; Djanie, 2015; Greene, 2011). They attend that Black women making the decision to wear braids, twists, and other textured hairstyles, opposed to straightening their hair, has led to problems in the workplace or even loss of employment (Caldwell, 1991; Collier, 2012; Craig, 2002). Donahoo and Smith (2022) present a number of cases where Black women have been discriminated against as a result of their hair in its natural or protective style state, with some individuals pursuing legal action and being dismissed unjustly.

Not only can hair discrimination contribute to harmed self-esteem and confidence, but it can also further impact one’s performance in school, extra-curricular activities, or in the workplace. There are numerous cases of hair discrimination in various settings that have been made public. An example of this from the United States: a teen was suspended for having his hair in dreadlocks. The article notes that he has been derailed from an early graduation with his

mother stating that: “his grades are suffering, which also means he is not able to play football or participate in any extracurriculars” (ABC News, September 18, 2023)

Due to hair discrimination, there is a law in the United States intended to prohibit race-based hair discrimination. It bars employers and schools from penalizing people because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including Afros, braids, dreadlocks, twists, or Bantu knots. A federal version of this law named CROWN Act, an acronym for, “Create a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair”, (CROWN) passed in the House of Representatives in 2022, but it was not successful in the Senate. As of September 1st, 2023, 24 states have enacted a version of the CROWN Act (ABC News, 2023). A 2021 legal justice pursuit by a Black father, alleging racial discrimination and ethnic intimidation when his daughter’s hair was cut by a school worker without the parent’s permission, was only just confidentially settled in early 2023 with the suit containing 10 counts (ABC News, 2023). It has been noted that there is intergenerational, historical, and in some cases, religious significance of hair in the Black community. It has been politicized, most notably during the Civil Rights movement and 1964 act. These are practical examples of seeing the tenants of CRT as a theory in action such as the notion that racism is ordinary and not aberrational; the social construction of race; and the idea of storytelling and counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic (2001); Hartlep, 2009). Resisting white supremacist ideas and beliefs about appearance and in particularly hair while finding the courage to tell these stories, challenges Eurocentric dominated societal norms of what is considered the standard.

Bernard (2009, 2004) discusses an awareness and strong racial identity, which has helped participants in the noted studies to fight and resist the anti-Black racism that surrounds them. Boudreau (2015) also highlights the sense of pride that participants of her study exude when there is a well-understood racial identity. With this however, referenced in the finding's themes,

internalized racism was identified as an anti-Black racism trauma response. James (2022) references numerous scholars who have pioneered the work on internalized racism. It can be conceptualized as a form of racism, a psychological response to experiencing racism, and/or an external sociocultural program (James, 2022). James describes that internalized racism is “theorized to be both a source (i.e., a form of racism) and consequence (i.e., a psychological response, product of sociocultural processes) of racism, and race-related stress” (p. 2). Further, “internalized racism results from repeated experiences with racism and exposure to racism that occurs via external, acculturation, and socialization processes (Hipolito-Delgado, 2010; Tappan, 2006 as cited in James, 2022, p. 4). To expand on this, PTSS considers vacant esteem which examines the effects of having little to no worth because of systemic societal conditioning of Black inferiority. Co-researchers discussed their compromises of feelings self-worth in certain spaces as a result of certain experiences. Chanae specifically speaks to her inherent confidence in herself that over time in a toxic and racist work environment began to show up in her minimizing herself.

Like what was discussed in chapter 4 about trauma exposure responses, internalized racism can be both an individualized and collective response. As noted by co-researcher Angee, her own rejection of Blackness is an example of internalized racism. She explains in her digital story that she slowly began to dislike herself because of the anti-Black racism that she was experiencing. Johnson (2008) emphasizes that internalized racism involves both the conscious and unconscious acceptance of a racial hierarchy that consistently ranks white people above people of colour. It can also be said that as a coping tool, internalized racism can deter Black people from external consequential actions. Jermal discussed this when he received an insulting comment about his hair and instantly was angered however, he chose to resist his initial reaction

to respond. Instead, in this instance, he chose to remain silent. However, he also made the decision to act by deciding to cut his hair after he had been thinking about it for some time due to the negative commentary, he would receive from non-Black people. AT and CRT tell us that we need to continually show up as our authentic selves despite what the world says about us. Other co-researchers like Nicole discussed her dilemmas with hair yet, still wears her curls proudly.

As identified in the findings chapter, co-researchers explained how their places of employment are a major site of oppression and source of traumatic anti-Black racism experiences. For example, both Chanae and Nicole referred to anti-Black racism in their workplaces that included their colleagues' perpetuating microaggressions and gaslighting. Bernard et al. (2020) discuss the concept of concrete ceilings that ANS women face, particularly, while working in the public sector. The intersectionality of race and gender have contributed to the curbing of professional advancement. Moyser (2019) found that women are more post-secondary level educated; however, they are more often underrepresented in leadership positions. Black women are said to experience "double jeopardy", a term Moore (1991) coined to describe the barriers faced resulting from intersecting racism and sexism (as cited in Bernard, Sangster, & Hay, 2020). According to Carroll (1982), Black women in the United States work twice as hard but receive much less in return for their efforts (as cited in Bernard et al., 2020). Bernard, Sangster, and Hay (2020) affirm that African Canadian women have similar experiences of this double expectation and standard. Linnabery et al. (2014) found that Black women have more negative experiences than white men and women in the workplace, and that Black women rely greatly on social supports and self-care. Co-researchers expressed the appreciation and gratitude for the supports that they have in their lives including, for example, faith, family, friends, mentors, and cultural resources. It is essential that ANS people have established circles of

support and healthy coping strategies in place for their lives. Informally, these relationships are built and understood more deeply when incidents of trauma occur.

Building on Moore's (1991) concept of double jeopardy, Bernard et al. (1993) explored the *triple jeopardy*, encompassing the race, class, and gender oppression that Black Nova Scotian women face, particularly in the social work sector; and advised a multi-layered approach to addressing these issues to support these women in achieving success and upward mobility (as cited in Bernard et al., 2020). For some women, despite the potential for the development of health issues due to racism-related stress, they feel forced to stay in their toxic work environments to support their families, an experience commonly referred to as "golden handcuffs" (Bernard, et al., 2020, p. 101). Perseverance, self-determination (Kujichugulia), and resiliency were observed in each of the co-researchers' digital stories in many ways. Sylvia refers to this theme several times in her digital story: "thriving in the future, making structures that work for us", "standing strong, being present", and "Black women leading, supporting each other". Chanae, Nicole, and Angee also express it through their words of empowerment to self and others. Jermal simply, yet boldly repeats, "you can't stop me". LaMeia demonstrates her ability to keep going by continuing to recognize the beauty of a safe and welcoming home, despite her traumatic experiences within other home settings.

Bernard et al. (2020) report that ANS women in their study acknowledged challenges associated with lack of self-confidence due to barriers such as trauma, stress, isolation, and health issues. Their study, which included 21 ANS women participants working in the public sector, identified various barriers that existed for the women in the workplace. An overarching finding in Bernard et al. (2020) study was the impact of experiences of systemic anti-Black racism which prevented employment advances. Additionally, barriers within the workplace such

as being the only person of colour; financial barriers; and the legacy of historical racism with the province of Nova Scotia were noted. Chanae referenced being the one Black employee at the management level in her workplace and being denied for career growth opportunities. Nicole referenced her personal space being violated repeatedly due to the touching of and attempts to touch her hair without permission. Angee spoke of the financial sacrifice that she had to make by leaving a workplace environment that was toxic.

Exclusion and Othering: Racial Battle Fatigue

Despite ANS people working tirelessly to make, create, and develop opportunities of belonging for themselves, co-researchers acknowledged the fatigue that can come from this. It was found that there were similarities between these experiences of racism and the combat fatigue of soldiers. The concept of Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was introduced by William Smith (2004) to theoretically frame and analyze the profound impact of racism on African Americans in predominantly white institutions of higher education (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Smith (2009) labeled RBF: “the psychological, emotional, physiological, energy, and time-related cost of fighting against racism” (as cited in Pizarro & Kohli, 2020, p. 298). RBF is “a response to the distressing mental/emotional conditions that result from facing racism daily (e.g., racial slights, recurrent indignities and irritations, unfair treatments, including contentious classrooms, and potential threats or dangers under tough to violent and even life-threatening conditions)” (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020, p. 180). Over time, Smith and colleagues have expanded the construct of RBF to include:

the stress of unavoidable front-line racial battles in historically white spaces leads to people of color feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically drained. The stress from racial microaggressions can become lethal when the accumulation of physiological

symptoms of racial battle fatigue are untreated, unnoticed, misdiagnosed, or personally dismissed. (Smith et al., 2006, p. 301)

Co-researchers shared their symptoms related to RBF and what they have done to address these. Some co-researchers have sought medical attention to cope with the effects of anti-Black racism.

Recognizing the correlation between stress, trauma, and health, as discussed above, Smith et al. (2007) write specifically about African American male students' experiences in historically white institutions of higher education. They found that there is a link between RBF and physiological symptoms, such as issues of fatigue and elevated blood pressure, as well as psychological symptoms like anger, loss of self-confidence, and hypervigilance. Jermal, the only male co-researcher in my study, spoke about this when sharing one of his experiences of anti-Black racism.

There were some notable gender and age/generational differences among co-researchers when it came to how racism was experienced: "I am usually the only Black guy in the room" – Jermal says (DST Workshop #2). This held true for him being the only male in this study, also. Yet, there were many similarities despite age and generational gaps. Co-researcher Angee exclaims: "And how do you still have the same story as me [...] and I'm just sitting here listening to you, and I'm going, how? It's 2021". (DST Workshop #1)

There were also references made to age and generation by co-researchers regarding their support for one another. Co-researcher Sylvia wondered about her position as an older person in terms of helping the younger generation in their trauma: "Like, it's just like, I mean, I feel like, my gosh, should I, as a person who is older, [...] show up better for people?" (DST Workshop #3). This relates to one of van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk's (2009) warning signs of trauma

exposure response, which can also be felt as though one is not doing enough or has not done enough and could be or should have done more. In response to Sylvia's comment, Chanae says: "You show up exactly how I need you to." (DST Workshop #3). Trauma exposure response warning signs will be discussed further below.

Pizarro and Kohl (2018) cite key scholars' (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Jay, 2009; Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2007) writing about RBF, and conclude that people of colour in traditionally white spaces can experience:

(a) hypervigilance, (b) hyper-visibility and hyper-invisibility, (c) social withdrawal from colleagues, (d) self-censorship in school settings, (e) loss of self-confidence and questioning ability or worth, (f) giving up personal goals for professional acknowledgment and advancement, and (g) adopting the dominant paradigm, practices, rules, norms, and roles for teachers of Color (p.7) in the context of education.

These have been named within the themes identified in chapter 4, such as feeling singled out and isolated; being made to feel inferior and de-valued; minimizing oneself; and internalization. Gildersleeve et al. (2011) continue that severe sense of isolation can come about because of these experiences and exorbitant investment of time and energy into confronting racism, which all co-researchers spoke to. There are also significant psychosocial and emotional impacts of RBF on people of colour, such as anxiety, frustration, anger, anger-suppression, helplessness, hopelessness, and depression (p.7). As well, physiologically there are effects such as a loss of or increase in appetite, extreme fatigue, hypertension, and sleeplessness. Co-researchers spoke to many of these psychosocial and emotional impacts while sharing the impacts that they have felt as a result of anti-Black racism trauma through the workshops and within their digital stories. Despite these negative effects, co-researchers demonstrated the

resisting and challenging of the dominant discourse of white superiority. They do this by showing up, taking appropriate action within their wellness and healing, and soaring above the stereotypical narrative.

According to Zautra et al. (2010) resilience can be referred to as one's ability to cope with adversity: "the ability to bounce back or rebound from stress and to quickly regain or return to an initial state of health" (p. 4 as cited in Everet et al., 2016). Additionally, "the capacity to continue forward in the face of adversity while experiencing growth and enhancing functioning as a result of healthy reactions to the stressful experience" (Zautra et al., 2010, p. 4 as cited in Everet et al., 2016, p. 337).

Many scholars have explored the meaning of resilience. Bernard (2000) and Bernard and Este (2005) have examined this notion from an ANS perspective. They found that resilience and survival, with strong racial identity, are key components (Bernard & Este, 2005; Boudreau, 2015). Vinita Srivastava, the host of a six-episode podcast called "Don't Call Me Resilient", which explores race and racism, quotes: "In response to President Barack Obama's call to be resilient after the devastating impact of the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, activist and lawyer, Tracie Washington, told Al Jazeera's Fault Lines: 'Stop calling me resilient'.... Because every time you say, 'Oh, they're resilient,' that means you can do something else to me. I am not resilient" (Srivastava, Don't Call me Resilient, Podcast, 2021). Kaika (2017) picked up the discussion in her article:

If we took Tracie Washington's objection seriously, we would stop focusing on how to make citizens more resilient 'no matter what stresses they encounter,' as this would only mean that they can take more suffering, deprivation or environmental degradation in the future ... focus instead on [trying] to change these factors. (p. 95)

While there is validity and genuine respect in acknowledging the challenges and barriers that people of African descent face while continuing to thrive, these writers assert that it is not enough to acknowledge resilience; rather, we must challenge the core of why it must even exist. In 2021, I, in my public speaking capacity gave a keynote speech for the Halifax Regional Municipality's International Women's Day event. With heartfelt words, I invited attendees to:

Imagine a world where we didn't need to be resilient because we were all treated fairly and justly. A world where the attacks that the isms such as racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia, for example, did not exist. A world where talking about these things were not perceived as "rocking the boat" or awkward and uncomfortable. Or maybe only happened once a year during AHM when we are reminded of the lies of our history or only about enslavement and how terrible this was but hey, it's over now and Black people can do everything that everyone else can do! Don't call me resilient unless you've got some strategies and solutions for creating me a life where my life does not depend on my ability to be resilient. Don't call me resilient until you are willing to name, claim, and address the inequities that I face as a Black woman.

This served as a call for people to reconsider their ideals about identifying resilience without considering responsibility. Now, three years later, I would add, "let's stop calling white people brave for speaking about their own privilege and power, while those most impacted by such power and privilege must always stand brave in spaces that are unwelcoming to them without acknowledgment of their bravery or simply their discomfort". Co-researchers such as Chanae and Angee spoke to the resilience and legacy of African Nova Scotian people. Similar to Jermal's use of 'you can't stop me', he interchanges it in one part of his digital story with "they can't stop me", demonstrating his resilience. Nicole states in her digital story that as a Black

woman, she will continue to fight. AT asserts that “people of African descent can reclaim and recenter their cultural identities” (Mullings et al., 2021, p. 10) which means bringing their true and full selves to the spaces that they enter. However, the Africentric worldview is not always recognized or valued. Acknowledging the determination, will and self-dignity, we cannot find rest there. Rather, let us encourage folks to share and discuss, as a human responsibility to humanity, with the act of acknowledgment and reconciliation; an act another’s life is dependent on.

Curtis et al. (2019) write about cultural safety, a term first used by Dr. Irihapeti Ramsden and Māori nurses in the 1990s in New Zealand. Cultural Safety, which was first used in nursing and midwifery education, can be described as providing “a focus for the delivery of quality care through changes in thinking about power relationships and patients’ rights” (p. 493). Further, it is about acknowledgement of the barriers to “clinical effectiveness” (p. 13), arising from the natural power imbalances between provider and patient. Providers should be aware of decolonizing, considering power relationships, implementing reflective practice, and giving the patient power in deciding if the clinical encounter is indeed safe for them. With this, the provider is to challenge biases, attitudes, assumptions, prejudices, and stereotypes that may be influencing their quality-of-service provision to certain patients. Expanding our understanding of racism and the traumatic impact that it can have on people of African descent is part of cultural safety. Examining through the lens of patient and provider, we can begin to recognize the significant impact of anti-Black racism trauma on the health and well-being of this collective of people. In the context of education, Pimentel et al. (2023) write that “cultural safety supports meaningful integration of culturally responsive practices that build young Black children’s cognitive capacity and challenge the dominant narrative on racialized people” (p. 4). The legacy of

educational exclusion for ANSs is relevant today. and the advocacy work done by the ANS community, contributes to the PTSS, AT and CRT framework. We can also recognize how this concept of cultural safety can play a role in research with the power imbalances that exist between researcher and those being researched. Co-researchers took pride in that they are the owners of their digital stories. Specifically, Chanae said:

Oh, I've already been thinking, brewing in my mind. How am [I going to use this in] HPL? What is the program I'm using with this. [...] I've already been talking about it with my team [...] Because I was showing them this video and now my creative juices are flowing. (DST Workshop #3)

Sylvia also commented:

There's something about when we hold each other up, you know, as women, as Black women. And that is just like to me is just being such a model of just like, how we can see how we can be there for each other. And then, that helps everybody in that. – DST Workshop #3.

Taking Action Against Assault

The literature discusses the intersection of justice when considering anti-Black racism. Additionally, CRT calls to apply a critical lens that centres the Black experience in seeking social justice and countering dominant narratives. Members of the Black community have been victimized by the criminal justice system's abuse in many ways. At varying times in history, resistance has been used through demonstrations such as boycotting, protests, and choosing to act legally through human rights cases. For the co-researchers of this study, acting against the

assaults that they have experienced was necessary. Co-researchers talked about the varying degrees to which one might act, including building the courage to speak out and challenge the assault; addressing it with their employer or company representative; or filing a human rights complaint. Nicole specifically references in her digital story the action that she took against a retail store that accused her of stealing. She provides a summary of the actions that followed her taking a stance and how she was left without proper resolution.

From April of 2022 to March of 2023, 1,765 inquiries were received by the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, with 98 complaints accepted and 12 closed by a settlement reached (Figure 4).

Figure 4*NS Human Rights Commission Inquiries & Complaints April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023*

APRIL 1, 2022 - MARCH 31, 2023	
Inquiries Received (all incoming calls/emails/visits)	1765
Complaints Accepted	98
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(a) – Best Interests Not Served	17
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(b) – Complaint is Without Merit	8
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(c) – No Significant Issue	22
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(d) – Previous Alternate Process	9
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(e) – Bad Faith/Improper Motives	0
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(f) – No Reasonable Likelihood	5
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(g) – Exemption Order Granted	0
Complaints Closed by Non-Jurisdictional	0
Complaints Closed by Settlements Researched	12
Total Number of Complaints Closed	73
Average Days from Initial Contact to Complainant Signed	237
Average Days from Initial Contact to Conclusion	775

Note. List of complaints for 2022-2023

Compared to 2021 to 2022, inquiries received were down from 2,682; however, with only 67 complaints accepted and 21 closed by a settlement reached (Figure 5).

Figure 5*NS Human Rights Commission Inquiries & Complaints April 1, 2021-March 31, 2022*

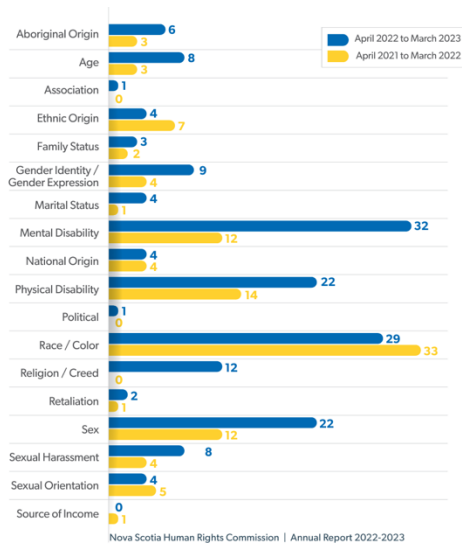
APRIL 1, 2021 - MARCH 31, 2022	
Inquiries Received (all incoming calls/emails/visits)	2862
Complaints Accepted	67
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(a) – Best Interests Not Served	40
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(b) – Complaint is Without Merit	17
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(c) – No Significant Issue	33
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(d) – Previous Alternate Process	2
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(e) – Bad Faith/Improper Motives	0
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(f) – No Reasonable Likelihood	4
Complaints Closed by s. 29(4)(g) – Exemption Order Granted	0
Complaints Closed by Non-Jurisdictional	0
Complaints Closed by Settlements Researched	21
Total Number of Complaints Closed	117
Average Days from Initial Contact to Complainant Signed	249
Average Days from Initial Contact to Conclusion	744

Note. List of complaints for 2021-2022

The highest number of accepted complaints during the 2022 to 2023 year were due to experiences of mental disability, followed by race and colour (Figure 3). In the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year, the highest number of accepted complaints were based on race and colour (Figure 6).

Figure 6

NS Human Rights Commission Complaint by Characteristics

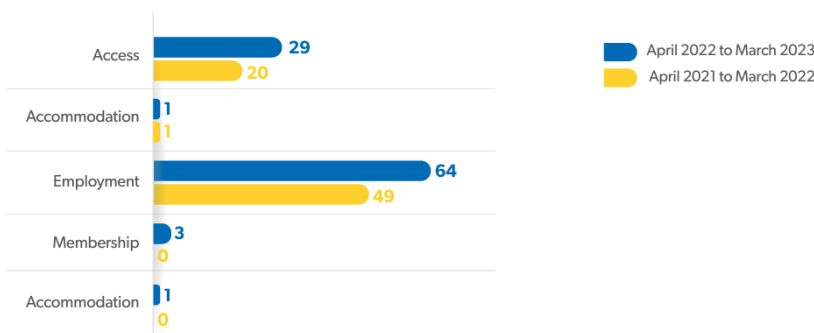


Note. Race and colour are the leading characteristic of complaints 2021-2022

Further, from both April of 2021 to March of 2022 and April of 2022 to March of 2023, the majority of complaints of discrimination were experienced in employment settings, with more cases accepted in 2022 to 2023 (Figure 7).

Figure 7

NS Human Rights Commission Complaint by Area



Note. Employment is the leading area of complaint

While some co-researchers spoke about their choice to pursue human rights as a means of justice, it is important to acknowledge the courage that it takes to make this decision. As mentioned in the findings, Angee discussed being in the midst of a case for seven years, with still no resolution at that time. The reinjury and re-traumatization that occurs for the “complainant” can be just as impactful on the individual as the human rights violation itself. Further, pursuing legal measures can make one more vulnerable to additional consequences, such as disciplinary pursuits and further isolation within the workplace; financial hardship if income has been lost; and negative media press.

Theory and Practice

Bernard et al. (2020) assert that according to Asante (1991), the concept of Africentricity was developed as a means of “studying the world and its people, concepts, and history from an African worldview” (p. 171). Lynn (2005) contends that Africentricity seeks to centralize and normalize the narratives of people of African descent. Further, Schiele (1997) explains that Africentricity empowers communities that have been historically oppressed by supporting both their community and self-help efforts. To build upon the ways that Africentricity can contribute to the lived reality and betterment of the African community, in 1966, scholar, Dr. Maulana Karenga, developed a week-long celebration from December 26th to January 1st that we now know to be Kwanzaa (InterExchange.org, 2020). This holiday, honouring African Heritage in African American culture, was developed in response to the 1965 Watts Riots in Los Angeles with the intent of bringing African Americans together as a community (Interchange.org, 2020). Kwanzaa celebrates the use of seven guiding principles that represent values of African culture to help build and reinforce community among AfricanAmericans.

These principles are Umoja, Kujichugulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba, and Imani. Each principle holds a different meaning, with Kujichugulia meaning self-determination: “To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves” (Kalonji, 2014, p. 203).

There is a focus on this principle as it relates to the theme of co-researcher digital stories.

It is important to acknowledge the value of the collective identity when conducting research and programming with people of African descent. Africentric theory emphasizes collective identity and a sense of connectedness among people of African descent (Bernard, Sangster, & Hay, 2020).

In her study with ANS participants, Boudreau (2015) also found a consensus that there is power in the type of collective identity that Africentric theory centres. Considering that the foundational elements of the programs analyzed in her study are rooted in Africentrism, Boudreau (2015) found that peer support was a critical benefit or source of support for ANS study participants:

I never felt validated or intelligent [...] until I got to university and saw other [Black] individuals that were struggling with the same things that I was struggling with. [...] it was an all-inspiring experience for me to be in university. (Jude, Study Participant, p. 123)

The co-researchers spoke to the importance of peer and communal support in their lives, including throughout the DST process. Co-researchers’ sharing of their experiences without reservation was met with empathetic and genuine understanding, care, support, and validation, which serves as another reason why Africentric theory and critical race theory align well with DST. For example, Angee shared how she viewed the experience of us all coming together:

I think you really captured, Rajean, without even knowing it, or maybe you did. You really captured a diverse digital story board that really shows the intergenerational connection, but also stands in line with the, I guess, standpoint there, that we all have similarities in our experiences, right. And they're all being informed as Black women [and Black men]. So, thank you for this opportunity. (DST Workshop #3)

The Healing Nature of DST process. The literature asserts that DST, as a methodology, can offer a therapeutic element to the process of co-creation with co-researchers (Gubrium et al., 2013). With DST being linked to the Frierian model (Friere, 2000), participants construct narratives as they create change. Themes around a collective issue are generated and then transformed into digital format (Gubrium, 2009, p. 186). Co-researchers named the healing and therapeutic elements of DST explicitly in the findings. They expressed how the DST process, along with the digital stories as a creation of their own, facilitated a healing process in their individual lives. They discussed the need to continue the healing work and expand to others in the community. Angee, for example, referenced the therapeutic nature of this process. Nicole also noted how often we do not get to be in these types of supportive settings, and it felt good.

It has been noted that there is a growing recognition and acknowledgment that storytelling holds great influence in the world. Writers have noted that researchers are employing digital tools in therapeutic ways (Haigh & Hardy, 2011; Laing et al., 2017a, 2017b; Rossiter & Garcia, 2010 as cited in Lang et al., 2019). This element of healing is very fitting in a study like mine, as my research purpose was to explore and examine experiences of race-based trauma with ANS people. AT and CRT both affirm and encourage the stories and voices of people of African descent to be present and centred within dominant discourse. DeGruy (2005) discusses the characteristics of PTSS as congruent to those of PTSD. By the very design of this process, co-

researchers in this study have identified the process as a means of healing while exploring and examining the very thing that has caused them distress: race-related trauma. More recently, there have been growing opportunities for storytelling and discussion around matters impacting the Black community with an emphasis on wellness, self-care, and healing such as kitchen table talks, the Barbershop and Salon talks and various healing circles models. DST provided an opportunity in contribution by facilitating an invitation for healing and can continue to serve in this way. Co-researchers expressed that it has not been taken for granted that they now have these opportunities to talk openly with each other and have access to services for wellness where our ancestors did not. PTSS invites us to uptake the call for healing among people of African descent across the diaspora. Expansive research has focused on the need for healing amongst descendants of enslaved Africans in North America, whom we know as African Americans, African Canadians, and ANS. Scholars (BLAC, 1994; Este & Bernard, 2003, 2006; Ruck, 1997) all share the importance of exploring strategies for coping with race-related stress, particularly with ANS people. Therefore, DST as a research method complements the theoretical framework that has guided this study, which encompasses Africentric theory, critical race theory, and PTSS.

New Technology. In addition to the healing nature of DST, Lang et al. (2019) discuss the learning of new technology as a benefit to DST as a method for conducting research. Skill-building can be identified as a positive attribute to research methodologies, particularly with marginalized and racialized groups who have had fewer opportunities for this. Additionally, in the Nova Scotian context, with programs such as Imhotep's Legacy Academy, which offers programming based on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for Black children and youth, the need for more opportunities to engage in these subject areas is encouraged and promoted. The movie *Black Panther* has also showed us on the big screen that

Information Technology (IT) is a profession that Black people, and Black women specifically, can succeed in and can be leaders in.

Co-researchers commented on what they learned about technology throughout the DST process. None of the co-researchers had used the video editing website, *WeVideo*, before this study, yet they were able to eagerly learn the tools and features of the software promptly and effectively. Co-researchers were able to also share with the rest of the group, in a teaching way, how they used such features, demonstrating their deeper understanding of the website after using it. Co-researchers explained how this process enhanced their technological skills by learning how to use a video editing software to create their own digital story. They gained skills in image and video uploading; narration and voiceover recording; overlays; transitions; and other audio features. Although co-researchers expressed some of their challenges, they stayed the course and completed their digital stories with pride. Chanae took her skills further by posting her digital story on her social media platforms.

Vicarious trauma and trauma stewardship. “Are you sure all this trauma work hasn’t gotten to you?” (p.1) is the question that opens the first chapter of Van Dernoot Lipsky and Burke’s (2009) book on trauma stewardship. This question is one that co-researchers indirectly discussed during the research process, while recounting their experiences of and responses to race-based trauma. It was alluded to, throughout the entire DST process, how important it has been for co-researchers to find the balance between fight and preservation of self in moments of distress, resulting from anti-Black racism. As discussed, responses to race-based trauma can be individual as well as collective. It was observed that co-researchers could relate to and empathically understand the experiences that each other spoke of, regardless of if they had experienced it or not. The witnessing and hearing of experiences of anti-Black racism has proven

to also directly and largely impact co-researchers, which aligns with what we know about the manifestations of trauma, despite not necessarily experiencing it directly.

Van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk (2009) discuss the notion of trauma stewardship as a necessity for anyone who “interacts with the suffering, pain, and crisis of others or our planet” (p. 11). Further, it is an approach that applies equally, whether the trauma we encounter is glaring or subtle, sudden or prolonged, isolated or recurring, widely recognized or barely perceived (p.11). They discuss a trauma exposure response, which they describe as “the transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet” (p. 41). A trauma exposure response has occurred when external trauma becomes internal reality. They outline the following sixteen warning signs of trauma exposure response: feeling helpless and hopeless; a sense that one can never do enough; hypervigilance; diminished creativity; inability to embrace complexity; minimizing; chronic exhaustion/physical ailments; dissociative moments; sense of persecution; guilt; fear; anger and cynicism; inability to emphasize/numbing; addictions; and grandiosity, an inflated sense of importance related to one’s work.

Many of these responses align with what co-researchers have identified through the findings of this study which reflects what DeGruy (2005) uncovers in her analysis of PTSS. For instance, Nicole specifically referenced in her digital story the hypervigilance that she experiences wherever she goes. Likewise, Chanae speaks to the exhaustion she feels because of daily assaults of anti-Black racism, specifically in her [former] workplace, including feeling like she needs to minimize herself and her creative ideas and expression. Angee referenced a mental health diagnosis that she now lives with due to anti-Black racism. While sharing stories of experiences amongst the group, there was a sense of interconnectedness and harmony of all

elements that make up the universe (Schiele, 1997). As well, Este and Bernard (2003) and Lynn (2005) discuss how collective consciousness raising and identity is shared among people of African descent. This was also demonstrated through Bernard (2000) and James et al. (2010) who share findings from studies exploring survival and coping with racism among men living in different geographical areas. These men, who lived in three different provinces, shared similar experiences of racism and coping strategies to deal with it. Interconnectedness was observed in this study through the indications of a common experience as mentioned above. This was also demonstrated through the shared emotions of anger, frustration, and sorrow; and through body language like head shaking to suggest “yes” or “no”, eyes widening, hand movements and gestures, humorous smirks, giggles when appropriate, and the touch of one to another on the arm or shoulder.

This chapter analyzed the findings of this study as it relates to the research question, existing literature, and the theoretical framing of this study through PTSS, AT, and CRT. While there have been several studies exploring race-based trauma, doing so with ANS people through DST is a new contribution of research.

The final chapter will summarize what has been discussed throughout the chapters of this dissertation. Implications for the research and recommendations for future research will also be discussed to close the chapter.

Chapter 6: Dig Deep and Debrief- Personal Reflections

“And to anyone questioning my magic, well, that’s between them and them.” (Angee, Digital Story)

Considering the nature of this study, and the storytelling approach, it is fitting for me to include a section on my personal reflections. Through field notes and audio voice recordings, I was able to process my own thoughts, emotions, and reflections throughout the research study, specifically post-DST workshops. My personal reflections as a doctoral student conducting this research, specifically from a participatory research approach, are important in understanding my position as an outsider and insider (Bourque, 2014). Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) talk about the “outsider-insider role of the researcher in DST which is reached through a delicate balance and negotiation of ingroup relationality and trust” (p. 9). Although I was not necessarily a co-researcher in the process to the same capacity of the co-researchers who took part in this study, as I did not create a digital story, I realized through this process that I could have been. What is interesting is that while I was invested in this work, I had not considered myself a participant in this work to the same effect as those who would express interest. I had not had a complete comprehension of the phenomenon of trauma, in particular, how it manifests as a result of racism. I could name the effects; however, I had not truly considered these effects and the immense impact in and on my own life. It was not until I began to conduct the initial interviews with interested participants of the study, where my developed screening tool was used, that I had finally made the connection of my own experiences of race-based trauma and the impact on my life. Leaning into the work of van Dernooy Lipsky and Burk (2009), I began to understand the

impact of trauma on a deeper level than solely my own experiences or encounters with racism, and rather, those that I had been exposed to through friends, family, and fellow Black people across North America.

Recognizing Vicarious Trauma

As identified in the DST process themes, vicarious trauma is something that I have reflected on repeatedly as a doctoral student researcher in this process. I actively listened to the sharing of co-researchers and could resonate with parts of what each of them had shared about their experiences. This was not only because many of my own experiences were similar, but also due to a deep empathy that I have for people. Ensuring that co-researchers were informed about the risks of this study, including the potential for an activation of vicarious trauma and knowing what that meant, was important to name with the group.

Given my background in both community and clinical social work, offering counselling support to people in several varying ways, I believed I had enough knowledge and skills to manage the vicarious trauma that I anticipated to experience through this study. Considering that all co-researchers might not have had a similar background or could need additional supports, a resource list of free and private supports was developed and made available to them. This was vital to me as a clinician to ensure that folks had access to services that might have been required for their own well-being. As mentioned, some co-researchers expressed already having clinical support through their own therapist, with experiences of race-based trauma being the very reason for seeking services.

Inspired by Digital Storytelling

With personal and professional interests in “storycatching” (Baldwin, 2005) and “storytelling”, I was very intrigued by DST as a methodological approach to conducting

research. As an experienced facilitator, my experience and interest combined would position me well in conducting this research study. Co-researchers shared feeling safe, comfortable, heard, and supported during the DST process. Angee affirms: “This was amazing. And I think, LaMeia, I believe you said it as well, that these types of dialogues and safe spaces are important for us as Black women. So, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this work, Rajean, because it was work, but it was fun work” (DST Workshop #3). There were also many mentions of how this work can be expanded to build upon this research subject, but also other topic areas as well. Scholars (Gubrium et al., 2013; Lang et al., 2019; Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018) discuss the effectiveness of DST with varying populations. It was evident that this research methodology was effective with this group of co-researchers and in addressing this study’s research question.

Through this study, co-researchers chose to be active agents of change in the pursuit for equity by using their voices, positionality, resources, and lived experiences to reach others. Co-researcher Jermal shared what his desire was in participating in this study and creating a digital story:

Selfishly, I don't know why, but I feel like with everything going on in the world, tomorrow is not promised, and it's not really our alarm clock that wakes us up, it's a higher power- whatever that is. Like I said earlier, and that can be taken away tomorrow. So, I want something that can outlive me if I were to die tomorrow. I don't have children, I'm not an author, but something like this can last forever, and somebody can use it for their own benefit to help them become stronger. Or even if they're just trying to navigate a certain situation- if they can type in something on YouTube and this will pop up. If it just helped one person, that would make me happy. (DST Workshop #1)

Similarly, LaMeia also spoke to an ever-living element of this work:

So, I kind of wanted to also make it like a time stamp in a sense of that's what I was expressing in this moment, in this process, that will allow it to kind of be like a starting place to me wanting to maybe just develop this further, you know. (DST Workshop #3)

It is inevitable as a researcher to have bias in research. As an ANS woman, I had a deep desire and goal to amplify the voices of other ANSs in sharing their experiences of race-based trauma. Identifying a gap in the research with this population and research study topic, it was my hope that through this study, not only would race-based trauma be brought more attention and consideration, but that co-researchers would also be able to create something through a research process that belonged to them. DST is a methodology that is growing in popularity as we learn and develop more with technology. Storytelling is a long-standing cultural practice within the ANS community, as outlined in the methodology chapter, and has been a source of knowledge translation for centuries. That said, record keeping has not always been consistent and there are many stories that have been or are at risk of being lost due to lack of or improper recording and archival. While efforts have been made to enhance this, more resources could be made available in this respect. More opportunities for storytelling can also be made possible through invitation into educational institutions, governmental department training sessions, and within provincial and federal correctional facilities and offices, for example.

As a doctoral student researcher, I was pleased with the way that this study was conducted and the true collaboration and contributions of co-researchers. I truly felt a sense of collectivity through the entire process from the initial workshop to the final sharing session. One of the limitations of participatory research is that there will always be clear power differentials between the researcher coordinating and conducting the study and those who are participating (Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018). Vacchelli and Peyrefitte (2018) discuss the power imbalances

that exist in the research process naturally. Participatory research methodologies such as DST can help to minimize the power dynamics; however, it must be acknowledged that they do still exist. The role of facilitator that the researcher plays in the DST process is one that I was very appreciative of and felt worked well in this process. Participants shared that they were eager to share and appreciated the opportunity to participate in a co-researcher capacity as such. There was an expression of feeling a renewed sense of empowerment in their experiences, as Nicole put it:

I felt really empowered by those conversations and being able to share shared experiences and know that you're going through your own thing- and like you said, sometimes you do feel isolated, but to know that there are supports, there's other people. There are ways that you can connect even through things that are difficult. Thank you.

(DST Workshop #2)

Finding the healing through the story sharing

Recognizing the impacts of trauma on one's mental health, the DST process design of learning, sharing, and creating was identified by co-researchers as healing. Coming together as such and discussing the traumatic experiences of anti-Black racism proved to be therapeutic. DeGruy (2005) discusses how we can be the healing despite the residual effects and implications of PTSS. She offers ways that people of African descent can do this, beginning with looking inward. Moreover, it is indeed important to consider the necessary healing required to address trauma transferred intergenerationally. People of African descent have had to "create a way out of no way" throughout the legacy of our history of exclusion and current day anti-Black racist tactics. Boudreau (2015) speaks to this in her research study with many of the culturally specific community driven programs that exist in Nova Scotia being those created by Black people for

Black people. Co-researcher Sylvia shared her concerns when thinking about what the future generation will need to endure:

I don't know when the white dominant system is ever going to get it. It's like heroin because I have two grandchildren who are going to go into these things. And it just makes me very sad inside, you know- they're going to need to do some of the things that we've all been doing but it's like, it should so be gone by now. (DST Workshop #1)

This call for healing is something that scholars of Africentric theory have explored at length. There is growing literature that examines the need for healing individually and collectively through the lens of critical race theory (Marder, 2021; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Reflecting on Karenga's (1966) Nguzo Saba's principles, which were referenced above, there is a continuous need to action these within the ANS community.

DST as an effective method for qualitative research

It was evident that the facilitated DST process in this study was effectively conducted and met the goals of DST according to scholars in the field (Gubrium et al., 2013; Lang et al., 2019; Vacchelli & Peyrefitte, 2018). Additionally, it met the goals of co-researchers in their ability to answer the research question through their own expression, co-creation, and telling of their stories in digital format.

This has been such an amazing process to be on this journey with you guys. I think you got to your research question, Rajean. I think it was pretty evident that racism is a trauma that has affected all of these beautiful Black women and Black males in one way or another. It was very layered, and I think we all actually even got to the same ending point, which Sylvia really drew us to really nicely in the end... is that rooting. And so, I can't wait to read the report. (Angee, DST Workshop #3)

Co-researcher Angee also shared with the group feedback that she received from her loved ones:

And after I was done, it took me about eight to nine hours- you know that it was fun to create- my youngest son already heard it, and my oldest son was kind of like, you know when you create something, and you don't really value what you create. And he's a creative so, I really value what he says. Yeah, he said, "Wow, mom, that was powerful". You know, his favorite part was the recess when they were teasing. He said, "I felt that."
(DST Workshop #2)

She continues:

And my youngest son, because I wanted them to tell me, I asked him the question: "I want you to tell me what your takeaway from this video is because I wanted to know if it was getting to the heart of the matter" And it did. My youngest son said, "what I took away from it, mom, was how racism and name-calling can injure your spirit because you said that, right? And then I also saw a huge message of self-love," and I would say that's what I was going for. I didn't want to leave you all heavy. – DST Workshop #2

Bowen-Reid and Harrell suggest that "those individuals who do not openly acknowledge their racist experiences may be at greater health risk than those who recognize and concertededly address its existence" (2002, p. 32 as cited in Began et al., 2012, p. 105).

Sylvia also drew attention to the traumas that her parents would have endured, including the inability to complete education. In her explanation of her digital story design, she made reference to the self-determination that she exemplified in her own studies:

It was the education part where I talk about being present in Education. It kind of goes back to my mom, and my mom passing, because it was really important for her that I went on to school after high school- that it [education] went on because I didn't want to. But she died before I was finished high school and I just thought, I have to do that for her to honour her. But it became a really important piece of being able to be supportive for each other. Not just having education, but why and what that was about. That was really important too. (DST Workshop #3)

As DeGruy (2005) also discusses, for generations, African Americans have not had opportunity to name or treat their trauma. Sylvia says this very thing in referencing her parents' quality of life. Co-researchers collectively concurred that the DST process was a meaningful and enjoyable process which prompted reflection, thought, and creativity.

I was very happy with it, for the most part. I enjoyed the process of diving into myself a little bit, and going through old photo albums and then looking for certain bits of myself that don't really reflect on my own life too often. So, I enjoyed that aspect of it and trying to relay the story I wanted to tell. (Jermal, DST Workshop #3)

One co-researcher spoke specifically about their appreciation for the act of reflection that was encouraged through this process. They also expressed feeling gratitude for the past and for the present, which they were reminded of through the sharing, listening, and crafting of the digital stories:

What a gift it was to be in this [study] because I was looking at pictures and thinking back to things and I just thought, man, there's so much that we have gone through. I just feel like, I just need to stay in the strength moment. [...] I think about in that picture, it's

my sister and myself in it, right. And we were together working on, you know, summer programs and then later I had the gift of taking care of her. (Sylvia DST Workshop #3)

Further, co-researcher LaMeia provided a validating comment to co-researcher Sylvia about what she portrayed in her digital story about her identity:

I kind of felt like it really reflected you and reflected your work and reflected the community, as well from the professional context [...] we talk about- the settings in your stories, being about the places you've worked and stuff. So, you know, just imagining what it was like to go through with, you know, not just all of the different jobs that we know that you kind of had, right. And just then we can only imagine, like what it was like to kind of be the leader in a lot of those spaces, right. [...] You really do show yourself in this video, and I felt that like it really was a reflection of you. So that was, I don't know if that was like, I know that's probably a part of your goal, but it was effective in that way. (DST Workshop #3)

Another layer of identity was referenced by co-researchers in their introductions in DST workshop #1 of their ANS or African heritage: “I am a sixth generation African Nova Scotian hailing from Lucasville” (Chanae, Workshop #1). All five female identifying co-researchers share how they show up as Black women among other parts of their identities. Co-researcher Angee identifies also as being an “author, activist, student [...] and mother”, and co-researcher Nicole as a “daughter, friend, sister, entrepreneur and student” (DST Workshop #1). Co-researcher Sylvia also speaks to the title she holds as “Grandmother” and the importance of the intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren; aunts, nieces, and nephews; and ultimately elders and young people. She recalls her own experiences as a young person:

It is very important now for me as a grandmother, to really, you know, try to be there for my grandchildren virtually and in person, and just like to be the space [for them]. I didn't have Grandparents in my life- they were passed, but I had like lots of, you know, Aunties and stuff. And you know, that was a place where you could go and you could just, you know, everything was fine. You could say whatever you wanted to say, and it was ok, you know- they weren't looking at you the next day and saying, "Well, yesterday you said that", it was just like such a beautiful experience. And so, I really want to be that for them as well. (DST Workshop #1)

Understanding that the impact of vicarious trauma is inevitable and that those in helping roles must learn how to be trauma stewards, which requires consideration of the importance of identity, leads this discussion to introduce the digital story themes analysis and discussion. With reflection being a main theme of the DST process, these themes in their entirety weave moments of reflection throughout. In the following sections, co-researchers reflect on their final products, the digital stories.

Laughter heard throughout process- this was quite interesting as it speaks to the inability to, at times, adequately explain certain cultural customs and norms, such as humour among certain groups; in this case, ANS people.

Co-researcher Chanae also explained how she felt during the process of creating her digital story: "I cried, too, doing it, so like you can probably hear it in my voice and in certain spots- I could for sure. - DST Workshop #3. This was further recognized during the third DST workshop when co-researchers referenced physical emotive responses to the DST process, as well as through observation of physical tears when watching each other's digital stories, which will be discussed in more depth under the Peer and Group Support theme.

Co-researcher Chanae also shared her gratitude in the closing workshop for having the opportunity to co-create:

I messaged Rajean after this and I was like, thank you for this. I was very closed to the whole process. And then when I realized what I kind of created, I said, thank you so much for [the opportunity] to be a part of this process and allowing me to share this story because I didn't think I would have ever, ever, ever created this. (DST Workshop #3)

LaMeia affirmed Chanae's experience: "That's really beautiful Chanae- I'm glad that this process did that for you". (DST Workshop #3)

Trauma Stewardship and Trauma Informed Care

As van Dernoot Lipsky and Burk (2007) write, trauma stewardship is a call for us to engage oppression and trauma, be it through our careers or in our personal lives. This can be done by "caring for, tending to, and responsibly guiding other beings who are struggling" (p.11). While doing this, we are not to internalize others' struggles or assume them as our own. ANS co-researchers alluded to this throughout the study, acknowledging the roles that they hold beyond co-researchers of the study.

As research focused on trauma, trauma-informed practices, and diversity among communities of people who experience it expands, there is becoming a greater understanding of what trauma can really entail beyond the clinical setting. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)'s Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative states that "trauma is a widespread, harmful and costly public health problem that occurs as a result of violence, abuse, neglect, loss, disaster, war and other emotionally harmful experiences" (2014, p. 6). It has been declared a public health issue and there is evidence that unaddressed trauma

significantly increases the risk of mental and substance use disorders, as well as chronic physical diseases (p. 6).

Harris and FalLOT's pivotal study in 2001 introduced us to the term trauma-informed (Centre for Trauma Abuse Treatment US, 2014). Over the past several decades, SAMHSA has contributed greatly to the trauma-informed care realm of practice. They have done extensive work defining trauma and have generated a concept inclusive of "The Three Es of Trauma: Event(s), Experiences of Events(s), and Effect" Interesting is the analysis of effect, which supports the findings of this particular research study and the impact of anti-Black racism on co-researchers' health and well-being:

The long-lasting adverse effects of the event are a critical component of trauma. These adverse effects may occur immediately or may have a delayed onset. The duration of the effects can be short to long term. In some situations, the individual may not recognize the connection between the traumatic events and the effects. [...] Traumatic effects, which may range from hypervigilance or a constant state of arousal, to numbing or avoidance, can eventually wear a person down, physically, mentally, and emotionally. (p. 12)

This was shared by co-researchers in the above findings section when referencing trauma exposure responses, as well as the internalized racism identified. SAMHSA has formulated a concept of a trauma-informed approach that is grounded in a set of four assumptions: Realization, Recognize, Respond, and Resist Re-Traumatization; and six key principles: Safety, Trustworthiness and Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration and Mutuality, Empowerment, Voice and Choice, and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues (p. 13 & 14). They state that, "a trauma informed approach is inclusive of trauma-specific interventions, whether assessment,

treatment or recovery supports, yet it also incorporates key trauma principles into the organizational culture” (p. 13). Further:

A program, organization, or system that is trauma-informed realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization. (p. 9)

Carello and Butler (2015) conclude that:

to be trauma-informed, in any context, is to understand the ways in which violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have impacted the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the design of systems and provision of services so they accommodate trauma survivors’ needs and are consonant with healing and recovery. (p. 264)

With more focus put toward learner-focused approaches, Carello and Butler (2015) apply a trauma-informed approach in education that considers a broader understanding of trauma and trauma-informed approaches. In North America, being ‘trauma-informed’ has been a more common practice within healthcare, education, and justice seeking settings, specifically in more recent years.

Trauma-informed approaches in learning environments

Acknowledging that education and schools are the sites of where many racialized people experience the most oppression, such as anti-Black racism, including the co-researchers of this study, we must consider how this is or is not currently being addressed. Understanding the responses to trauma that have been noted by co-researchers and discussed throughout the literature, there must be a deeper understanding of intergenerational and race-based trauma among school staff and administrators. Further, this understanding must translate to policies and procedures, including the ways in which students are held accountable for their actions, otherwise known as “discipline”. Jean-Pierre and Parris-Drummond (2018) argue that punitive discipline is ineffective and detrimental to the student, particularly the marginalized student. They call for alternative discipline interventions for individuals, as well as school-wide acknowledging of the academic achievement gaps that exist for such students because of these punitive measures.

When considering the punitive disciplinary policies that schools may pursue, it is noteworthy mentioning the “school-to-prison pipeline”, a term now commonly used to define the pathway for youths from the educational system to the criminal justice system in the United States (McCarter, 2017). This term captures disciplinary measures taken in schools, particularly those disproportionately impacting racialized youth which include imposing suspensions, expulsions, and juvenile justice referrals. This has been found to significantly decrease their access to instructional time and school engagement, while increasing their risk of interaction with the criminal justice system (McCarter, 2017). It is important to contextualize the understanding of what was shared about the negative formal schooling experiences that the co-researchers spoke about, such as Sylvia’s punishment she received at school for physically and

psychologically defending herself, and low expectations of students from authorities like teachers and guidance counsellors. While co-researchers may not have shared any specific experiences related to school disciplinary practices, there is growing research that explores these intersections (Hamilton-Hinch et al, 2021; Jean-Pierre & Parris, 2018).

Understanding the complexities of trauma and trauma-informed approaches comes with a solid idea of social justice. As the Philadelphia ACEs study outlined, certain populations in society are of higher risk for both childhood adversity and trauma. Crosby et al. (2018) assert that addressing trauma with trauma-informed approaches is therefore, in many ways, an act of social justice. Scholars (Brasford et al., 2021; Dutil, 2020; Yaroshefsky, & Shwedel, 2015) have begun to look at ways to incorporate trauma-informed approaches into schools.

There is also something to be said about trauma and learning, given the underrepresentation of ANS students specifically, in higher education. According to 2016 census data, unemployment rates are also much higher than unemployment among whites, with more Black youths between the ages of 20 and 24 unemployed compared to their white counterparts (NS Advocate Website, 2016). The NS Advocate argues that “It’s not a matter of Black Nova Scotians giving up. Stats Canada data suggest that slightly more African Nova Scotians are actively trying to find a job than whites”. This is a clear example of the historical roots and practices of anti-Black racism that informs today’s work force.

Cozolino (2013) studied extensively the intersection of neuroscience and trauma and its impact on a child’s ability to learn. With that, there needs to be an understanding of trauma in its varying complexities, including cultural and a will to appropriately navigate culturally appropriate trauma-informed approaches. Acknowledging that educational settings, in and of themselves, can be traumatizing for ANS students is the first step in understanding the trauma

that these students may be impacted by. Scholars (Johanne & Parris, 2018; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Woodbury, 2016) have written about how trauma responses can be veiled as behavioural outbursts, for example, with ANS students. This can greatly impede the learning experiences of the trauma-impacted student, thus making school a challenge for students with trauma histories. When it comes to cultural trauma, where communities have been impacted intergenerationally, repeatedly, we must understand what SAMHSA (2014) argues:

Communities can collectively react to trauma in ways that are very similar to the ways in which individuals respond. They can become hyper-vigilant, fearful, or they can be re-traumatized, triggered by circumstances resembling earlier trauma. Trauma can be built into cultural norms and passed from generation to generation. Communities are often profoundly shaped by their trauma histories. Making sense of the trauma experience and telling the story of what happened using the language and framework of the community is an important step toward healing community trauma. (p. 17)

Anti-Black racism as a form of trauma must be acknowledged, validated, and serve as a reoccurring item for addressing on the agendas of institutional, workplace, and legal authoritative-led tables.

Consistent with the literature, the findings of this research study suggest that representation and challenging the anti-Black racist systems, practices, attitudes, and beliefs contribute to decolonization within education. Patterson (1982 as cited in Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021) asserts that, “Tackling antiblackness is about challenging the position of a Black person as socially dead, in other words, denied humanity thus ineligible for full citizenship and regard within the polity” (p. 54).

When I embarked on this doctoral studies journey with my various interests, passions, and plans to create critical change through research, I never imagined how much that I would learn about myself in the process. What I thought I knew about the traumatic impacts of anti-Black racism was limited to what I witnessed through other's accounts, without true consideration of my own experiences as well as the impact of this witnessing. Of course, I have experienced anti-Black racism and recall my very first memories of encounters during my early elementary school years. However, as I reflect over the trajectory of my life, I pause and ask myself, did I really understand the impact of these experiences on my life's journey?

This study revealed a great deal to me about the experiences of others, the common feelings, thoughts, and responses, internalized and externalized. It also revealed my narrow understanding, and further, limited belief of what trauma really is. Through the reviewing of literature, my knowledge was enhanced on the impact that anti-Black racism has had and continues to have on ANS people. I learned about the various ways that people can experience race-related injury and trauma. I understood the traumatic implications that these experiences could have on other people. However, what was absent from the bigger picture was myself and the trauma that I, too, experienced. It was not until I began data collection that I began to see myself and my own experiences reflected in the definition of race-related trauma. I finally began to see my own portrait in the house of the trauma that anti-Black racism lives. My experiences, encounters, and interactions with anti-Black racism were validated in a way that I had never considered before. It finally clicked that trauma was indeed much larger than what I had been conditioned to believe it was. I had limited my thinking to that of only certain types of experiences such as natural disasters, accidents, sexual assaults, being shot, and living through war, for example. This study sought to understand the traumatic impact of anti-Black racism on

ANS co-researchers through DST, yet I began to understand this impact within myself as well.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

“I know you will...”. Those words were heard on a video recording of a Black man in Halifax with his hands up in the air, while a gun was pointed at him by a white male police officer after threatening to “fill him with lead” (personal communication, 2021, July 12). A video posted on twitter shows the man once on the group and pinned by four officers, get tazed after being asked to put his hand behind his back and doing so, pleading, “I’m doing it” (Rutgers, 2019, December 3). I held my breath, felt my anxiety levels rise as he fled this awful scene. Would the officer shoot? If he did, would he shoot to kill? Thank God that he didn’t. However, harm still occurred even if unrecognized. Psychological and emotional harm were no doubt experienced by this man, as well as to those who viewed the recording, including myself. Vicarious trauma. How will this harm manifest within the man victimized or those who have viewed and potentially experienced vicarious trauma? The threat of harm, not to mention murder, by white police officers of Black people is a traumatizing reality– the possibility, the “what ifs?”, the frustrations that “it continues to happen time and time again”. The fear of normalization and de-sensitization because of the frequency, and in many cases, lack of justice served.

My interpretation of those four words, “I know you will”, speak to the collective recognition and awareness that police officers present a threat to the Black person. They are capable of murder and have murdered Black people unjustifiably. These four words as a response to the police officer’s seven words represent the reason why this research is necessary. Anti-Black racism, in all its forms, has the potential to be traumatic. Many of the institutions that we are forced to assimilate to, such as the institution of policing in this example, has proven to

have been built on white supremacy and further, white male supremacy. What we are seeing in the media, in the present day, is not new; it is just now being recorded. These acts are extensions of what Black people in North America have endured publicly for centuries without regard.

The literature demonstrates the traumatic effects that racism, in particular, anti-Black racism can and have had on people of African descent in North America. Not only does intergenerational and cultural trauma impact members of this group directly, but also indirectly and vicariously with the implications of such being evident of having a similar impact to incidents of trauma experienced first-hand. Further, this study is contributing to the acknowledgment and understanding that experiences of racism and community-level adversity variables intersect with racialized and marginalized communities, such as with African Nova Scotians, and have multifaceted implications. This research fills a necessary gap in the literature with a focus on a province whose rich history includes ANS contributions, accomplishments, culture, way of living and being, and their right to a healthy and well life.

Through this study, we examined coping strategies and calls for individual, familial, and collective healing, considering the impact on the health, well-being, and overall quality of life that race-based trauma can have on people of African descent. DST has proven to be a research method that can aid in one's journey toward healing.

The intersection of race and trauma is an under-explored topic of research with people of African descent, and more specifically, with African Canadians. Much of the literature around this topic is from an American context, which does not always acknowledge the African Canadian experiences of anti-Black racism. African American literature tends to focus on this group of people isolated from those of us living in their sister country. However, from the Canadian studies that are available (Benton, 1997; Este & Bernard, 2003; Etowa et al., 2014),

and anecdotally, it has been found that there are direct correlations between the African American and African Canadian experiences with anti-Black racism and its impact on our lives. The history has connected the relationship between African American and African Canadian people through the first waves of migration that Nova Scotia has seen. It has been argued throughout this dissertation that ANS people do indeed experience race-based trauma repeatedly over the course of their lives. The co-researchers of this study were able to identify and name the accumulative experiences of race-based trauma and the implications of their experiences with anti-Black racism stemming from the early years. There was a recognition of the historical exclusion of people of African descent in this province, despite their noteworthy contributions and existence to Nova Scotia. ANSs are a distinct group of people who can trace back three generations, at minimum, and make up the largest racially visible group in the province, constituting 2.3 per cent of the province's population (ANSA Website, 2011).

This research study has been liberating for the co-researchers involved, as well as for myself as the researcher. With emerging qualitative methodologies and methods such as DST arising out of the foundational approaches of participatory and narrative approaches, there are more opportunities for conducting appropriate and meaningful research with ANS people. There is a need for more research opportunities as such with ANS people exploring anti-Black racism and race-based trauma to contribute to the growing body of literature. There is also a need to promote healing amongst this community of people, as per the call by Degruy (2005), which DST has been proven to do. As found in this study, when there is an opportunity for ANS people to gather in sharing their experiences, there is a therapeutic element that is experienced. The co-researchers benefitted from sharing with one another and having their experiences validated through their "brother or sister". Learning about the new technology associated with creating the

digital story was another benefit that co-researchers gained. In addition, having the opportunity to reflect and recall memories and stories of co-researchers' families, childhood, and home communities were greatly appreciated.

The experience of creating a digital story brought confidence to co-researchers in their ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of their experiences to an audience. Co-researchers were able to trust the process of DST in their desire to bring awareness to the topic of race-based trauma experienced as an ANS person. While this study was designed to capture the experiences of anti-Black racism with ANS people, other racialized people may become curious about engaging in a DST process to explore experiences of race-based trauma in their own lives.

The use of DST has proven to be an exceptional avenue for exploring heavy topics that are not always on the radar of those who cannot relate; however, who are in positions of power and decision making. This study has contributed to the DST research family and has the potential to continue to be an effective methodology for exploring various other topics that ANS people may identify with. As a tool for teaching and healing, DST is something that can be used in and out of the research realm, as explained below when discussing implications for research.

Through the design of this study, co-researchers were able to explore experiences of anti-Black racism and the traumatic implications that these experiences can have on the quality of life for ANS people, while also contributing their knowledge toward a teaching tool. These digital stories have already served as a means toward healing outside of the research group. This was recognized by viewers of one co-researcher's digital story that was shared by them on their social media:

“Wow. I’ve never felt so seen! Being a Black woman in corporate is not easy- that’s [why] it is so necessary for us to speak up!” (Written comment by viewer of Chanae’s digital story)

Co-researcher Chanae’s digital story has also been a facilitator of teaching: “Can I access this somehow to share it with my colleagues?” (Written comment by viewer of Chanae’s digital story). Further, co-researchers expressed their gratitude and hopes for the future: “Thank you, Rajean, from all of us for bringing us all together in this important work in our community. (LaMeia, DST Workshop #3)

Van Dernoot and Burk (2009) assert that trauma stewardship starts with each of us as individuals having an understanding that our capacity to help others, along with the environment, is at its best when we ourselves are willing, able, and determined to be helped (p. 16). They also assert that to be an effective trauma steward, there is importance in knowing where “our own self ends, and another’s self begins” (p. 21). I, too, can identify as a trauma steward, having experienced many of the trauma exposure responses congruent with the findings of van Dernoot and Burk (2009). As an individual and professional invested in this work, it is crucial to understand the various elements that one must be aware of for effective practice, as well as self-preservation. I take pride in who I am, where I have come from, and the unique qualities, attributes, and gifts that give me purpose. I feel honoured to be able to facilitate opportunities for change and healing by way of research with members of my community. The method of DST has proven to be a culturally complemented, beneficial, and a meaningful means of collecting stories of real lived experiences. DST also facilitates the opportunity of retelling these stories on the terms of co-researchers engaged in the study process.

Implications and Contribution of Research

Benefits of this study for the co-researchers were identified by co-researchers. These included having the opportunity to come together with community in facilitated discussion; learning new skills and technology; healing thy self through sharing and vulnerability; and contributing to a growing body of literature that can be educational, transformative, and an act of social justice. There are also benefits for others. Viewers of these digital stories, including those in academia and external agencies and organizations, also have the potential of positive impact through how the digital stories can teach and inform pedagogy, policies, systems, and structures. This study additionally fosters benefits to me as a doctoral candidate, community advocate, educator and facilitator, and ANS woman. This research has enhanced my understanding of the traumatic impact that anti-Black racism can have on ANS people and how this can manifest. It has also advanced my research and facilitation skills, as well as developed new skills in DST processes as a research method. I have grown to value and appreciate the power of a story even more than before and recognize the vast potential that it has for individual, community and societal transformational healing.

The research study addressed the research questions with the goal of better understanding the experiences of race-based trauma and the impact on the ANS quality of life. While the topic of experiencing race-based trauma has undoubtedly been acknowledged as injurious and unjust, with a major potential to have negative impacts in many facets of our lives, co-researchers were willing to participate in this study despite that risk. There is a great understanding and demonstration of seeking to give back, collectivity, and interconnectedness that exists in the ANS community. This comes with having a sense of and the teaching of preparedness for what is to come in the sense of experiencing anti-Black racism. It is unfortunate that in this society,

experiencing anti-Black racism is not a matter of “if” but “when”. Compassion for one another and for us brings an element of “looking out for one another”, along with empathy, and understanding how one another may feel. With these, trauma stewardship becomes a natural embodiment within this community of people and participating in studies as such can serve as an intentional act of activism. Co-researchers expressed the need to find ways to assist other Black people in identifying and naming the traumatic implications that anti-Black racism can have. They also recognized the need to create opportunities to dialogue about this topic with others to aid in their healing journeys. As well, co-researchers identified that engaging in a DST process can facilitate self-healing by serving as a coping strategy. As well, creating the digital stories themselves is a contributing piece toward one’s healing journey. The opportunities to share the digital stories brings another layer of benefits, in that there is power in education, validation, and influencing change. Nicole demonstrates this when she shared months after the study was completed:

My human rights lawyer asked me how I felt about the case, and I thought to share my digital story with them to express my thoughts and feelings. The lawyer was blown away after watching it and said how powerful and insightful that it was.

Co-researchers discussed the opportunities that this research study could open in the conversations that are needed nationally about race-based trauma, specifically in Canada. Moreover, this speaks to the importance of conducting research with members of the ANS community as a historically rooted community of people in Canada, and further, North America. It was clear that although each co-researcher had an individual story, that story could resonate with everyone in the study. That resonating included an understanding of what anti-Black racism

is, and a genuine recognition of what it feels like to be racially attacked. Emotions, questions, and contemplation thereafter an experience was also collectively identified in the group.

Additionally, it should be noted that there needs to be an awareness of the balancing of responsibility resulting from the experience. This means that different experience calls for different trauma responses based on many factors that the individual is facing. This could include the setting that the experience took place, who is there, and what might be at stake, for example. As discussed above, trauma exposure responses can look different for different people and can also look different for different experiences or at different times in one's life.

This study revealed that there needs to be a true understanding of the intersection of racism and trauma, to deepen the understanding of the implications of these experiences on the lives of ANS people. As a developing field of research, studies exploring race-based trauma are necessary to advance the argument that racism is indeed a form of trauma. In advancing the work of DeGruy (2001; 2005), this study contributes to the claim that the residual effects of enslavement with African Americans are also being experienced with ANS people. DeGruy (2005) provides a compelling argument comparing the characteristics of post-traumatic stress syndrome to those of African people who endured chattel slavery. There is a need for mental and physical health care professionals to be educated on this correlation, to better understand and provide services to ANS people. This is necessary in providing culturally responsive care. There is also a need for all non-white people to understand the legacy of ANS people and why representation, designating employment positions, and scholarships are necessary.

Lastly, while there are studies and literature that directly examine and analyze racism and its effects among ANS people (Bernard, 2004; 2005; BLAC, 1994; Boudreau, 2015; Este & Bernard, 2003; Ruck, 1997; Williams, 2013), this is the first study to explore race-based trauma

with ANS co-researchers through DST. As discussed, DST as a research methodology offers a multitude of advantages specifically for members of racialized and marginalized groups. Further, it has fostered with co-researchers in this study, their ability to be creative in their expression of meaning which is what narrative research seeks to do (Gubrium, Hill, & Flicker, 2013). With storytelling being central to the ANS culture, there is an opportunity for this research to promote the discussion around race-based trauma with community, in hopes of facilitating healing and advancing the quality of life for ANS people. Through action and creating avenues for educating through DST, transformative change can really take place.

This research has brought the experiences of race-based trauma with ANS co-researchers into the body of literature exploring, validating, and bringing light to this reality for people of African descent. It has expanded upon existing literature exploring and analyzing the impact of racism with people of African descent in North America. It has also created an avenue for future research that will be discussed in the next section.

Future Research and Recommendations

Future Research

As noted in the limitations section, there were several varying layers of analysis that would be beneficial in future studies. This includes more development around gender and age. It is my hope to continue to explore and examine race-based trauma with Indigenous ANSs through DST. It was found that DST is a powerful methodological approach to exploring race-based trauma with this population. In building upon this research study, providing more opportunities for community members to create digital stories and participate in the DST research process, will provide more insight into how Indigenous ANSs understand and have experienced race-based trauma. Further, this would continue to address the gaps in the research exploring trauma by

bringing more awareness and attention to the validity of experiences of race-based trauma, specifically, intergenerational anti-Black racism trauma.

With all participants providing consensus for their digital stories to be shared beyond the group, this suggests that further studies may offer similar findings for participants in terms of the benefits found from participating in such process. DST as a participatory research approach can advance research opportunities with Indigenous ANSs for many of the reasons identified as benefits in the findings chapter, and above, in the implications and contribution to research section. Additionally, DST can offer opportunities for healing amongst different groups of people, considering its therapeutic nature and collective support. Co-researchers in DST studies can learn new technological skills and abilities and can produce something that can serve as a part of their coping toolkit and journey toward optimal quality of life.

In general, exploring and examining race-based trauma is an area that needs to be continued. The intersection of racism and trauma needs to be acknowledged and recognized when educating the broader community on how to be trauma-informed and how to be culturally responsive in-service provision. DST can facilitate this teaching while also serving as a vehicle for healing. Co-researcher Chanae shared:

I think that's why I want to share this story because [specific place] are so reluctant to change, to adapting their practices to being inclusive. We can write all the words we want on paper but unless you are actually taking those steps, you are not inclusive, you are not embracing diversity, you are not promoting all of these things, these values and core principles that you have written down. (DST Workshop #1)

A study that reviewed the ways in which DST can serve as an educational tool to inform practice, policies, and procedures would also be a valuable addition to the growing body of

literature concerning anti-Black racism trauma, as well as DST as a research methodology.

Recommendations for Implementation

There are many recommendations for implementing this ground-breaking study. Some of these recommendations were discussed with co-researchers as a part of the DST process. It was identified that the findings of this study should be shared in community. As discussed in the benefits section, this study offered co-researchers an opportunity to contribute to their healing journeys in experiencing and managing anti-Black racism and the traumatic implications that it can have. By sharing the findings and digital stories themselves with community, there can be an expanded opportunity for healing at this level. Additionally, community members can benefit through participating in the DST process via research or programming that could be created to promote healing.

It was also noted that this research should be implemented in educational settings, which might include but would not be limited to, secondary and post-secondary institutions; governmental, non-profit, and community-based agencies; and other organizations. In particular, the digital stories could serve as an educational tool in educating or training students and employees on the implications of race-based trauma with ANS people. Recognizing that this study was limited to only six co-researchers and does not reflect the ANS community in its entirety, nor would any study that is not inclusive of every ANS individual, it would be noted that these stories are of those who participated in the study. Noteworthy is that there are specific professions that could greatly benefit from this type of education while undergoing post-secondary education, as well as in their respective professions given their interactions with ANSs. This would include, but would not be limited to, teachers and educators; and health care and mental health care clinicians, including psychiatrists, physicians, nurses, and therapists of

various type.

Addressing Barriers and Challenges

Covid-19 Global Pandemic Restrictions and Black Lives Matter Movement

The Covid-19 global pandemic presented the world with many barriers and challenges to navigate as we determined our new normal for over two years, which some would argue have continued into present day. This study was conducted on the tail of most provincial restrictions which allowed the research to take place both virtually and in-person, while following current protocols at the time. While this study was able to be conducted with co-researchers in person, the pandemic itself created many barriers and challenges in relation to recognizing the despairing gap in access and services available for people of African descent. This is noteworthy, given the nature of the research study and the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on ANS people and communities. Moving between in-person and virtual communication and gathering did not negatively impact this study, however. Rather, co-researchers benefitted from this hybrid model, given the locations of co-researchers as well as competing responsibilities of their lives.

Additionally, along with the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020 revived the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement with the tragic murder of George Floyd. At a time when the news and media outlets were being heavily viewed and utilized for updates on the status of the pandemic, folks were also reminded daily of the trauma that anti-Black racism can create through witnessing Mr. Floyd's murder and countless others thereafter, on replay and repeat. This is not to say that it should or should not have been broadcasted in this way, as there are arguments to why this was on both sides. However, it is to bring attention to the vicarious trauma that can be felt by witnessing such occurrence even once. During this research study's DST workshops, we discussed the impact of the BLM movement and the tragedies which lead to its forming. We

shared how this has contributed to our own experiences and responses to the race-based trauma experienced in our lives, as well as what action can be taken to address it considering the global impact of BLM, as well. We also acknowledged how it seems as though BLM is less in the forefront now, four years out from its peak and question the intent and authenticity of some of the affiliates who had claimed to be allies. Nicole shared her “shopping while Black” experience, and despite the company denying that this occurred, they were eager to donate something to the Black Lives Matter cause in her name. There is a continuous challenge simply around contradictions for ANS people in this province when it comes to recognizing and acknowledging anti-Black racism.

It was identified that there was a potential risk for psychological or emotional discomfort (e.g., anxiety, stress, loss of confidence, regret for disclosing personal information) given the nature of the research topic and question. Co-researchers were informed of this risk and were required to consent to participation acknowledging the risks associated. While co-researchers did express feelings such as identified above, there was an acknowledgment that despite, co-researchers did feel empowered from their participation. The noted risks were managed through clearly explaining the potential risks that could arise out of participating and acknowledging them. They were also managed through the availability of a resource list that was provided to co-researchers with various supports and professionals they could contact if they required further psychological and/or spiritual and wellness support (as mentioned in the methodology chapter). To my knowledge none of the co-researchers contacted these supports, as many had therapeutic support already in place.

As discussed in the findings section, race-based trauma has been identified as being experienced as early as the first years of grade school. In acknowledging this reality, students are

being exposed to a multitude of potentially traumatic race-based experiences. That said, educators need to be culturally or racism-trauma-informed along with traditional trauma-informed approaches and understand that there is always a potential for race-based trauma to be experienced by their racialized students. Being culturally or racism-trauma-informed is a phenomenon that I believe can be explored in a deeper way to understand cultural responsiveness. Additionally, students deserve to be informed of the traumatic implications that they may be enduring because of anti-Black racism for their own knowledge, self-awareness, well-being, and healing. Therefore, school supports, clinicians, healthcare, and justice workers alike should also be culturally or racism-trauma-informed, as well.

This doctoral research study is an important contribution to research seeking to understand and teach others about anti-Black racism as a form of trauma. Due to its participatory narrative nature through an arts-based method, DST, co-researchers have benefited from this process in a healing-focused way and have been empowered through telling their story, while also learning a new technological process. The study shows how powerful DST is as an interdisciplinary research method.

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