

Chapter 5

Racial Justice Protests Create Spaces of Hope and Healing: The Racialization of Space and Trauma in Contexts of Racial Tensions



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Abstract Spaces are boundless settings in which human experiences take shape. They provide contexts that can support the formation and maintenance of social relationships, reinforce or subvert existing power dynamics, and fuel or diffuse racial tensions. Drawing from a cross-disciplinary perspective, this chapter explores the racialization of space and trauma in contexts of racial tensions using the Black Lives Matter protests as a case example. First, we unpack the concept of ‘healing spaces’ as settings that can support adjustment and promote well-being by stimulating positive sensory experiences (e.g., hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch) among those affected by trauma. Second, we introduce critical spatial theory as a lens for thinking about racialization of space as an important element of healing spaces. Third, we discuss how spaces of protest might function as sacred spaces that can cultivate hope and support healing among those seeking racial justice. Fourth, we explore extrasensory pathways to make sense of the racialization of space and

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trauma in places where racial justice protests occur. We conclude by proposing an integrative model that considers the creation of spaces from a multifaceted perspective, which captures how protest spaces can support healing and sustain hope among aggrieved communities of color through extrasensory pathways that emerge from participating in such events.

Keywords Black Lives Matter protests · Critical healing spaces · Extrasensory pathways · Racial justice · Racial tensions

Introduction

Over the last two decades, research has contributed to critical spatial practices that question and transform the social conditions of people in different geographical contexts, leading to the emergence of critical spatial theory that incorporates elements of critical theory into spatial theory (Borden & Rendell, 2000). Some characteristics of critical spatial theory include an emphasis on praxis, a focus on achieving freedom from systems of oppression and domination, and a willingness to question long held epistemologies and ontologies (Soja, 2010). This has resulted in increased awareness and understanding of how the human environment “works to condition the operation of power and the constitution of racialized identities” (Delaney, 2010, p. 6).

A growing body of literature has also explored racism, colonization, decolonization, and whiteness from the lens of spatial relations and spatial justice (Delaney, 2010; Harvey, 2001; Soja, 2010). Such work explores the relationship between the unequal distribution of spaces, social representation, power, wealth, and racial categories (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). This approach to critical spatial analysis essentially considers how race and space intersect and unpacks the ‘racialization of space’ as a process whereby a given geographical setting is racially marked and imbued with a specific kind of meaning (Delaney, 2002; Zimmer, 2022). This constructivist approach to the study of spaces, as both a product and producer of social identity and activity, has opened a new way of conceptualizing spatial settings as places where social relations of power are formed, sustained, and transformed (Lefebvre, 1992; Soja, 2010). The shift toward a dialectical understanding of space, often referred to as the ‘spatial turn,’ offers a conceptual lens from which to consider how spaces affect power dynamics, race relations, and group identity formation (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011; Soja, 2010).

The racialization of space is particularly poignant in the United States, where the history of segregation through geographical lines and landscapes can be visibly seen (Delaney, 2002). How racial formation is given spatial expression has varied. For example, “spaces may be produced in accordance with various ideologies of color-blindness, race consciousness, integration, assimilationism, separatism, or nativism” (Delaney, 2002, p. 7). As such, when spaces are racialized, people can learn about their racial identity through their experiences in those spaces (e.g., where one

lives or goes to school). Racialization of space contributes to the ‘freezing of identities’ into ‘we’ and ‘they’ (Delaney, 2002, p. 7). There are overlapping linkages between space, social representation, identity, and the body, which might be why “the contest over space is symbolic of the larger contest over...bodies” (Griffin, 1995, p. 102).

Through reappropriating urban spaces and engaging in spatial practices (e.g., activities and practices that people routinely engage in within a designated place), individuals and groups practice ‘placemaking’—a protest against the placeless, racialized spatial backdrop of unjust cityscapes.¹ These spatialized relations need to be critically re-imagined in the context of racial relations and tensions. As part of this re-imagination, we take seriously the dislocation, displacement, and relocations of aggrieved communities of color as race-making events.

In this chapter, we introduce a framework that can help us create spatial awareness and formulate a new way of thinking about the racialization of space and trauma.² We consider how spaces are juxtaposed with “politics and privileges, ideologies and cultural collisions...justice and injustice, oppressive power and the possibility for emancipation” (Soja, 2010, p. 103). We bring multiple perspectives together using the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement protests as a primary case example

¹We use the term placeless to describe the landscapes and cityscapes developed within Eurocentric, colonial architecture practices. Indigenous methods of placemaking and space creation have different ontological and epistemological starting points than Eurocentric practices. Whereas Eurocentric conceptualizations assume land ownership and exchange value, Indigenous practices emphasize a connection to the land and its use value (Nejad & Walker, 2018). The absence of collective storytelling, meaning, and identity has led to creating what Augé (1995) describes as ‘non-place spaces’. Notably, modern architecture, influenced by Eurocentric ideals and values, prioritizes productivity, efficiency, and autonomy. One stark difference between Eurocentric and Indigenous architecture is the role of placemaking. While Indigenous practices and architecture typically emphasize placemaking, Eurocentric and colonial architecture have tended to create “placeless geographies” (Nejad & Walker, 2018, p. 226). In contrast, an intergenerational perspective that considers custodial responsibilities, connection to land, collective meaning and memories, narratives, and spiritual awareness inform Indigenous construction of place.

²Throughout this chapter, you will observe us referring to ‘trauma’ when describing Black experiences. The word trauma can infer a variety of meanings. Trauma as an umbrella term speaks to an emotional, physiological response to a stressful event. It can be individual, specific, and acute, as is often the case with someone experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder; it can be chronic and diffuse, as is the case of developmental trauma. It can also be cultural, historic, and generational, which is often referred to as collective trauma (Barlow, 2018). There is a vast body of research which points to intergenerational, historic, and cultural trauma among Black Americans (Barlow, 2018). One of the more evident manifestations of this is in the acute health disparity between Black Americans and other racial groups. Stark racial differences in health outcomes are observed in the United States, with the highest rates of morbidity and mortality over the lifespan observed among Blacks (CDC/NCHS, 2011). The *Biopsychosocial Model of Racism as a Stressor* suggests that it is the experience of discrimination (e.g., interpersonal racial discrimination) that causes a physical toll on Black individuals (Clark et al., 1999). Goosby and Heidbrink (2013) explore how these health conditions have long lasting generational impacts. Black families often have to cope with the effects of historical trauma and intergenerational racism as well. Only recently have psychoanalysts and psychologists begun to consider the significance of the intergenerational trauma of enslavement and how this might manifest within the individual (Vaughans, 2016).

of spatial practices and processes that reconfigure the vulnerable experience and transform racialized spaces of aggrieved communities to spaces of hope and healing.

Sensory, Healing Spaces, and Well-Being: A Critical Spatial Perspective

The study of healing spaces can be traced back to the work of Ulrich (1984), who examined the effect of the environment on recovery from physical pain in a hospital record of 46 patients that had undergone cholecystectomy—a common type of gall bladder surgery—from 1972 through 1981. Twenty-three patients had views overlooking nature, while the other 23 had views of a brick wall. After controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and health variables, Ulrich (1984) found that patients who had a view of nature tended to recover better after surgery than those who did not. On average, patients who had a view of nature had shorter postoperative hospital stays, were administered fewer doses of pain medication, and had slightly fewer post-surgical complications. Ulrich's study was one of the first to suggest an association between the environment and health. Since Ulrich's study, there has been a steady growth in interdisciplinary collaboration between the social and behavioral sciences studying how the environment shapes healing in the human body (Schrank & Ekici, 2017).

Along with the growing interdisciplinary work exploring different aspects of healing spaces, Sternberg (2009) describes how sensory experiences within those spaces can support healing and well-being. Sternberg explored the complicated relationship between neurobiological responses (e.g., senses, emotions) and the environment, arguing that color, shapes, smells, and sounds can stimulate a sensory experience in an environment that supports well-being. For example, symmetry and visually repetitive patterns, such as fractals that naturally occur in nature (e.g., snowflakes, waves, flowers, seashells), are soothing for the brain and may be one of the reasons that nature has a calming effect on the human nervous system (Sternberg, 2009). Other evidence has shown that sensory experiences can promote subjective markers of health and well-being (Hwang & Shin, 2015; Sternberg, 2009). For example, Boehm et al. (2012) found that aromatherapy was associated with an improvement in general well-being, sleep quality, and pain management among cancer patients. These findings suggest that sensory experiences may be important factors that can influence healing and promote well-being.

The concept of healing spaces suggests that the physical environment can impact a person's sensory experiences and emotional responses. This understanding has increasingly shaped how hospitals, theme parks, and city spaces are designed and built (Sternberg, 2009). No previous architectural movement was as preoccupied with health and the body as the modernist era (Schrank & Ekici, 2017). The concept of healing spaces builds on the notion of interdependence between health and the environment. In fact, health risk or disease prevention was an integral motive among

modernist architecture. As architectural historian, Colomina (2015), observed: “modernity is driven by illness. The engine of modern architecture is not a heroic, shiny functional machine marching across the globe, but a languid fragile body suspended outside daily life” (p. 73). At the height of modern architecture, medical practitioners, urban planners, and everyday people began to apply modern concepts about health and the body to create spaces they occupied (Schrank & Ekici, 2017). Regardless of a person’s lived experience, the spaces that we occupy have the potential to bring about extrasensory experiences that can support healing intentions through a meaning-making process that engages with a combination of different senses (e.g., sight, hearing, touch).

Extrasensory Integration

The capacity to attend to sensory experiences is an integral aspect of healing in spaces. Sensory input (i.e., having senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch) has the power to alter the brain and influence neurochemical reactions in the body (Ruden, 2011). This neurological process can be innate (hardwired) or derived through associations (as is the case when someone ascribes meaning to a sensory experience). Sensory experiences have the capacity to create a sense of felt safety, invoke terror and fear, or trigger the body’s fight-flight-freeze response (Ruden, 2011). Stories, narratives, and past experiences become associated with sensory experiences—what Ruden refers to as an ‘extrasensory experience’—that arise in response to sensory experiences. Sensory experiences are more common than we think and constantly impact our mood, behavior, and thoughts, although we are rarely conscious of these effects. Whether it is the music we listen to, the view from our office window, the smell of a loved one, or the visuals of a chaotic tabletop, these experiences implicitly shape us.

In addition to innate responses, such as in the case where specific visuals or sounds activate the fight-flight-freeze response, sensory input can also lead to responses based on sensory associations that could potentially become meaningful when they are connected with different experiences. For example, the smell of freshly baked bread may become associated with an attachment figure or a sense of home. The meaning connected to the sensory experience may contribute to a person’s extrasensory response. As Ruden (2011) puts it, “while the mechanisms by which sensory input produces this extrasensory response are not well understood, it must somehow involve the *meaning*, learned or innate, of the input to the organism” (p. 5). Through association, things such as ‘comfort food,’ smells, and even touch can take on new meaning and become powerful sources of healing (Ruden, 2011).

Sensory-based healing can help reframe unhealthy perspectives and support positive adjustment, thus bringing people into a place of healthier functioning. This becomes pivotal within the broader context of race, space, and trauma, especially when memories of one’s trauma are encoded in fragmented ways (Ruden, 2011; Van der Kolk, 2015). Sensory experiences can therefore bring a person back into the moment of trauma and disrupt a person’s regulatory system (Ruden, 2011). Van der

Kolk (2015) saw trauma as a high-sensory experience that is encoded within the sensory system. When spaces are racialized and perceived as contexts of trauma, they become boundless settings in which human extrasensory experiences can form part of the healing process. It is thus essential to consider the various ways in which sensory experiences, not only the recollection of unresolved traumas (e.g., what is seen, felt, or heard) but also how these pathways can be reworked to build new neural associations, can stimulate social connection and support healing.

A Critical Spatial Turn

We are bodies in space. We shape the spaces we occupy and, in turn, these spaces shape us. This perspective is grounded in critical spatial theory, which incorporates elements of critical theory into spatial theory (Soja, 2010). Some characteristics of critical spatial theory include an emphasis on praxis—a focus on achieving freedom from systems of oppression and/or domination. Although it has been common for social scientists to explore how elements of social life are reflected in spatial landscapes, social scientists have given less attention to how spaces shape social life. Elements of the social are not merely reflected onto space, but ‘spatial settings’ in return reinforce aspects of the social (Delaney, 2002). This bidirectional understanding of the social setting considers how space is not simply the “consequence of the social; it is constitutive of the social...an integral aspect of production of human categories and identities” (Sundstrom, 2010, p. 83). Spaces are produced by the social through experiences, memories, and cultural exchanges. In return, these spatial elements shape the social.

Integrating critical spatial theory with a healing spaces framework offers a conceptual lens through which to understand how spatial relations shape power dynamics, spatial justice, representation, and the production of racialized identities. Lefebvre’s (1992) work on ‘the right to the city’ provides insights on how capitalism survived in the twentieth century through its ability to occupy and produce space. This capitalistic impulse toward occupying spaces led to the creation of geographies suited to capitalist interests (Harvey, 2001; Soja, 2010). Lefebvre observed urban life producing ‘unequal power relations’ that led to inequalities and unjust distribution of resources across urban geographical landscapes (Soja, 2010). The ‘right to the city’ is a call for more spatial justice in urban contexts, involving both the right to decision-making processes about space production and the right for every member of a city to occupy and use urban spaces. In some instances, use of spaces in the interests of capitalism can turn urban spaces into structurally disadvantaged contexts that are racialized for unjust distribution of power and resources (McCann, 1999). Critical spatial theory provides us with insights into power relations and dynamics in spaces that create social change (Friedman & van Ingen, 2011). In bringing critical spatial theory and the concept of healing spaces into conversation, we propose a *critical healing spaces* framework that considers the creation of spaces from a multifaceted perspective. This framework integrates the

interdependent relationships between spatial practices, social representation, sensory experience, physiological regulation, and individual well-being.

Lefebvre & Franke (2013) notes that every person and social group should be involved in the decision-making processes that shape and control the creation of space. In response, Soja (2010) articulates the connection between decision-making processes and spatial justice. Soja argues that sensory experiences aimed at demanding greater access to social power and the right to valued resources in urban spaces are central to reclaiming democracy from those who have been using it to maintain their positions of privilege. Taken together, a critical healing spaces framework observes the tendency for those in power to disproportionately control decision-making processes. This perspective of spatial justice, which is outlined in Lefebvre's & Franke (2013) work, has fueled racial justice efforts (e.g., BLM protests) that advocate not only for 'the right to the city' but also access to spatial resources (e.g., police protection) that are considered less widely available to racially disadvantaged groups. In the next sections, we use the case example of BLM protests to explore how racial justice protests can create new extrasensory associations within urban spaces, thereby shifting the sensory experiences of these places from one that activates trauma responses to one that fosters social connection and healing through extrasensory pathways.

Race, Trauma, and Processes that Shape Protests Within Aggrieved Communities: A Case Example of the Black Lives Matter Movement

Whereas critical spatial theory invites us to consider how identity, positionality, and power dynamics are produced by and/or produce hierarchies of individuals and groups in society, the concept of healing spaces invites us to consider the relationship between human bodies, the environment, and extrasensory experiences. Integrating these two perspectives provides us with an opportunity to understand how racial movements redefine spaces of protest as contexts that support healing and sustain hope via extrasensory pathways. One of the social actors that has emerged in recent times as part of this narrative, as a resounding voice against the racialization of space in the face of unjust and humiliating subjection of the human body in spaces of violence, has been the BLM movement—a decentralized political and social collective protesting issues of racial injustice and police brutality against Black Americans (Lebron, 2017).

BLM was founded in 2013 as a response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was created by three organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi—as a political/social movement that could lend its voice and intervene to address racially motivated police brutality and violence inflicted on communities of color. The movement now has over 40 chapters around the world and continues to mobilize and lend its voice on issues of racial

injustice targeted at people of color. It endeavors to affirm the humanity and contributions of Black people to society and their resilience in the face of racism. One strategy adopted by the BLM movement is their widely attended protests in spaces where acts of violence against Black people occur. The movement incorporates spatial practices that support community and individual healing and takes an “intersectional holistic approach to Black...wellness, which is...infused with spirituality, culture, and ritual practices [that] reinforces connection to the Earth, to each other” (Bartholomew et al., 2018, p. 91). BLM incorporates a healing philosophy into its movement and integrates a framework of “healing justice that employs an anti-racist, intersectional...and politically informed therapeutic approach” (Bartholomew et al., 2018, p. 85). The movement anchors their healing praxis through tangible, concrete, and ritualized actions that involve collective chanting of words of justice and reinforcement of resilience in spaces where they gather for protests.

Processes of Racial Justice Protests

We first consider the processes involved in the racialization of space and trauma in the BLM spaces of protest. Concepts from both healing spaces and critical spatial theory can be seen in BLM mantras and practices, as the movement promotes systemic, communal, and individual healing. The movement also responds to Lefebvre’s (1968) call to ‘take back the city’ through recreating spaces and transforming capitalistic, racialized spaces into settings of hope and healing. The BLM spaces of protest seem to undergo four processes that are likely to alter or activate extrasensory pathways, namely, *production*, *transmission*, *reception/processing*, and *response* (Halfwerk & Slabbekoorn, 2015; Rivest et al., 2019).

Production

As a process by which cues are generated, production in critical healing spaces refers to the ways in which expressions of racial trauma and violence are triggered among people of color (Rivest et al., 2019). Racial justice movements use production to generate information (e.g., media, images) about a particular act of injustice against people of color. An example of a stimulus that can trigger a BLM response is police brutality. On May 25, 2020, a Black American man by the name of George Floyd was killed by a police officer in the city of Minneapolis, Missouri. Like many other similar scenarios, this led to a nationwide protest led by the BLM movement as a response to police brutality and racial injustice. When an unarmed Black man is gunned down by a security agency that is supposed to protect them, it generates media attention. Images from the media become the cues that precipitate responses from members of the BLM movement—the production theater that triggers racial trauma and activism.

Transmission

The second process in the racialization of space and trauma is transmission. According to Rivest et al. (2019), ecological transmission occurs when cues propagate through the environment. Consequently, transmission is the time from which the racially fueled stimulus is generated to the point where it reaches the recipient victim or community. With the saturation of Internet technology, the transmission of a stimulus can simply take a click of a button through social media to spread to the targeted community. When a Black person is killed by the police, the transmission process occurs as the news or images of the event spread throughout the community on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) and other channels of communication (e.g., news reports, community groups).

Reception/Processing

The notion of reception/processing refers to how sensory receptors convert cues (e.g., killing of an unarmed man) into a more vivid picture. In other words, this is how aggrieved communities detect and process stressful events (e.g., police brutality, racial injustice) by using sensory receptors to assess the gravity of the incident. For example, when George Floyd was killed while shouting “I can’t breathe,” many Black people that watched the video footage, regardless of the part of the world they lived in, were reminded of Eric Garner’s exact pleadings with law enforcement in 2014. They relived the same traumatic experience using their sensory receptors as they recreated the experience for themselves and spatialized the trauma through different adaptive mechanisms (e.g., anger, protests). Spaces where incidents of police brutality occur can be spatialized as contexts of trauma and perceived by those affected as *sacred*, as they mourn the loss by adorning the place of death with heartfelt eulogies, messages, and consolatory items (e.g., flowers) that enable them to spatialize their trauma. This process can also become the trigger that disrupts a person’s emotional connection with the place where they live, which might lead to a reparative response (e.g., protest) that aims to recover one’s place-based bond (see Counted et al., 2020, 2021).

Response

The previous three processes culminate in a response, which might involve a physiological, community, structural, and/or behavioral reaction to the cues that have been received and processed by an aggrieved community. For example, this is where aspects of spatial justice (e.g., street protests) are used to reclaim spaces that have generated collective racial trauma. Reclaiming spaces of police brutality through choosing an action from a set of alternative options, based on one’s interpretation of the available sensory information, can help transform spaces of collective trauma into meaningful counterspaces (McCann, 1999). Fig. 5.1 below shows how a

collective trauma triggered by a stressful life event (e.g., police brutality, racial injustice) can stimulate different processes that initiate a racial justice protest. However, the activation of extrasensory pathways at the spaces of protests can lead to healing, as we will see in subsequent paragraphs.

Extrasensory Pathways of Healing in Sacred Spaces

Through communal practices and protests, the BLM movement creates spaces of hope, which can support healing and transform spatial settings by incorporating physiological extrasensory processes of production, transmission, reception/processing, and response (see Fig. 5.1). Critical healing spaces comprise a constellation of extrasensory processes in spaces of police brutality that are reframed through a meaning-making process that involves the stimulation of sensory experiences. These experiences are stimulated by the sounds, shapes, colors, and the weight of emotions that are collectively experienced in their protests. Sounds, shapes, and colors may become examples of extrasensory pathways through which protests create the transitional space wherein racial truths about police brutality and injustice

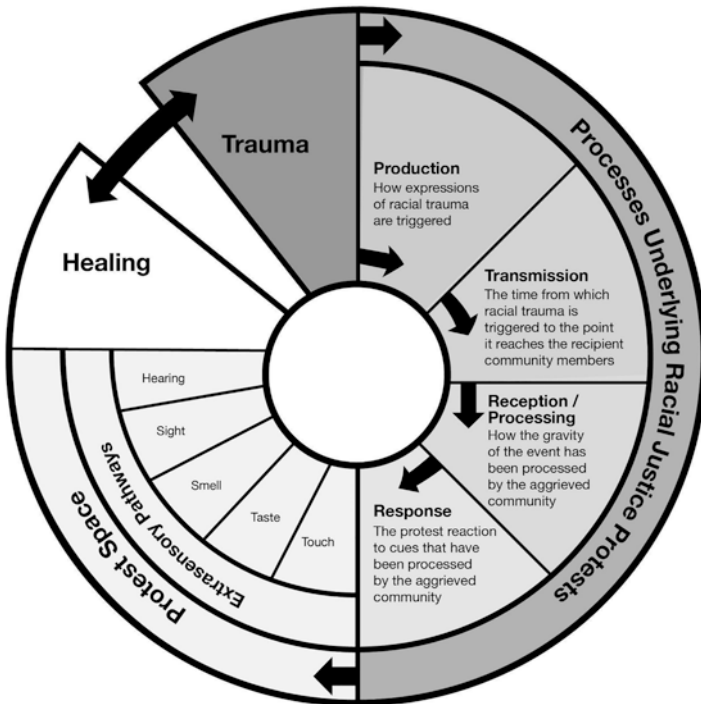


Fig. 5.1 An integrated extrasensory framework for racial tension and healing

are viscerally experienced and relationally processed. Although the sensory experiences at BLM protests may produce spaces that support healing and creatively address cultural trauma and injustice, we acknowledge that they can sometimes be settings that put people at risk of further violence and victimization. For example, some activists at BLM protests may sustain injuries and trauma because of the means used by authorities (e.g., tear gas, rubber bullets) to contain or control protests. While recognizing the possibility of sustained physical and emotional injuries from participating in BLM protests, in this chapter we focus on the potential benefits that can be activated in spaces of BLM protests through extrasensory integration.

Sounds of Hope

A sound can be a powerful sensory tool to reduce stressors and induce dopamine and endorphins and a sense of safety (Sternberg, 2009). This sensory experience has to do with how the sense of hearing (e.g., what BLM protesters hear, chant, and speak) within BLM protests can help people regulate their emotions, connect with others, and find hope. Although not exclusive to any specific faith tradition, protest leaders at BLM movements sometimes incorporate spiritual practices, such as prayers and religious text readings, into their marches. Some individuals may silently engage in spiritual practices, such as a poem for justice, a solemn cry to God for healing the Black community, or a plea to God to calm the situation and convict those responsible. These spiritual practices can empower protesters to become hopeful for a better future.

In addition to the sounds of prayer, ancient practices of chanting in a ‘call and response format’ are commonly used in BLM protests (Chambers, 2021). For instance, a person in a crowd or at a podium leads a chant by saying “Black lives,” which is then followed by a response from the crowd saying “matter.” The chanting can take many forms. In some scenarios, the protest leader may yell out “no justice,” then the crowd responds, “no peace.” In other scenarios, the names of those who have died from police brutality are shouted in remembrance. Chants are sacred affirmations that are used to convey a particular message. In many cases, the message is of hope and racial justice. Research suggests that chanting can improve attention and lift mood (Pearce et al., 2016). In BLM protests, chanting is used at a protest march to collectively unite the voices of protesters and shift their attention away from the traumatic stimuli they are processing (e.g., killing of an unarmed Black man) to a hopeful outcome (e.g., justice for the victim’s family).

Another important sensory tool used to stimulate the experience of hope and healing at BLM protest grounds is the sound of music. Studies have shown that music can help regulate mood (Bruner II, 1990; Västfjäll et al., 2012). Music is a powerful healing tool that is central to Black culture. Different genres of music (e.g., hip-hop, gospel, rap, pop) played at BLM protest sites stimulate sensory pathways that could help reframe feelings of anger, fear, and hopelessness. The sound of music at protest grounds may become another source of mood induction that can have a significant impact on the affect, cognition, and behavior of protesters (Alpert & Alpert, 1990).

Visualizing Hope

Sights at spaces of protest have the power to regulate the emotions of aggrieved people as they collectively visualize hope through extrasensory pathways based on what they see (e.g., symbols, art). Research has shown that people who are able to clearly see art or symbols that express a particular message (e.g., aspirations about sustainability) are more likely to act in accordance with the information they have read or seen (Hahn & Berkers, 2021). When members of aggrieved communities gather to protest against police brutality using placards, symbols, and visual art forms that inspire hope and action, those sights can empower people and help restore a sense of agency. A good example is the building of altars in BLM spaces of protest. According to the BLM toolkit on altar building practices (Black Lives Matter, n.d.), altars provide a place for protesters and aggrieved communities to “reground and reconnect to lineage and purpose” and are visualized as a “reminder of ancestors, Spirit, God or whatever [one] calls that which is bigger than [them].” These altars provide a sacred place at the protest site to visualize hope amidst multiple sensory experiences.

Cappelli (2020) analyzed artistic expressions during the BLM protests in Los Angeles following the death of George Floyd. The results revealed complementary themes of sorrow and compassion, aggression and hope, belligerence and the possibility of racial justice. The combination of political and emotional motivation among the artists helped advance racial and social justice (Vance & Potash, 2022). Art occupies BLM spaces of protest as people repossess them as Black spaces, at least during the time when the physical demonstration of a protest is occurring. This assertion of reclaimed identity, survival, and clearly marked resilience (Fischer, 2021) helps to instill racial pride in areas inextricably struck with communal mourning. The protest sites are often full of creative and colorful art forms that promote Black culture with words of hope and liberation. The arts convey a message of disappointment over the lack of humanity and the inability of the United States government to protect Black lives. Protest art serves to visualize hope through its messages and is rooted in powerful emotions of passion and hope for healing and change (Vance & Potash, 2022). For example, the color black and handmade signs are familiar visuals seen at the protest ground when one scrolls through social media posts or watches news that highlight the protest demonstrations. The color black can represent despair. In BLM protest grounds, black is symbolic and represents opposition to white supremacy and the historical Western narrative of colorism.

Feelings of Hope

A range of emotions are likely to be evoked both during and after participation in a protest. Emotions are often evoked in narrative form through the power of stories and the use of testimony. Testimony at protest sites allows for sharing of stories past that apply directly to the current situation and circumstance; sometimes somber, otherwise triumphant, they provide the opportunity for protesters to learn from each

other about their individual and collective experiences with oppression (Dominguez & Noriega, 2022). Testimony begets liberation and is a “responsible [form of] resistance that involves collective...solidarity” (Dominguez & Noriega, 2022, p. 7), which begets hope.

Like cultural movements of time past, BLM protests curate spaces dedicated to aggrieved people to occupy and magnify the cause. In these spatial settings, people are empowered to express their anger, frustration, grief, pain, mourning, loss, community, testimony, and triumph. These experiences can lead to sharing the weight of emotions with other protesters through social and physical exchanges of affection and condolences (e.g., holding hands, hugging, consoling one another). Unfortunately, protests and the spaces occupied by aggrieved people are often viewed negatively—as an inconvenience to normal life as well as a fear-inducing medium in otherwise neutral, integrated places:

Whenever Black people voluntarily gather among themselves, integrationists do not see spaces of Black solidarity created to separate Black people from racism. They see spaces of white hate. They do not see spaces of cultural solidarity against racism. They see spaces of segregation against white people (Kendi, 2019, p. 175).

On the contrary, spaces of BLM protests provide movement for those desiring physical action, camaraderie for those in need of community and togetherness, direction for those lost and confused, and relational connection for others feeling outside of themselves due to the trauma witnessed. This expression of emotions can become a positive outlet that can transform the affective states of protestors, which could have downstream benefits for their mental health, spiritual lives, and well-being more broadly.

Practical and Clinical Implications

Any sensory experience that can help hurting people reframe their trauma is worth exploring. Racial justice movements have the power to provide a healing medium. By creating extrasensory pathways of healing (e.g., sound, sight, touch), racial justice movements like the BLM movement can facilitate the development of neurological pathways that create new, positive associations to places and the spaces that are occupied. BLM protests can also be seen as an act of place-making for the Black community. Barlow (2018) observes that “historical trauma is a group’s public narrative linking the present to past trauma around health issues” (p. 902). Historical trauma involves the process of linking present trauma to past trauma. Through the use of music, chanting, color, art, and ancestry symbols, BLM spaces link public narratives about police brutality and racism to past trauma and history of injustice. As groups engage in these kinds of place-making acts, they build neural networks and develop new sensory associations to recaptured spaces.

To take a metaphor from individual trauma theory, much of trauma exposure, reprocessing, and healing involves desensitizing the person to the trauma narrative

and creating new, more balanced associations to the trauma story (Ruden, 2011). Trauma therapy involves uprooting ‘stuck’ thoughts and assisting the vulnerable individual with creating a more balanced narrative that shifts from ‘I deserved this because I am broken’ to an acknowledgement or acceptance that ‘wrong was done to me but that does not mean I was deserving of it.’ It is a categorical shift in one’s sense of self and a recognition that there was a need for protection and being valued that was not upheld by the perpetrator, knowingly or unknowingly. This process can involve an acknowledgement of the wrong experienced, some form of forgiveness, and a creation of a new narrative. Oftentimes in traumatic experiences, one either fights or flees; a less talked about, but still prevalently experienced response is the act of freezing. When one freezes, they endure—outside of the self—watching the event happening to them, but not claiming it as their own. It is a sophisticated form of denial that silences yet maintains the hold of guilt and shame tied to not having fought or fled. As the title of Van der Kolk’s (2015) well known book reminds us: ‘The body keeps the score.’ To remove the hold of guilt or shame from the ‘frozen’ Black body, reprocessing must take place so that positive associations can be built and healing can take place. Using intentional sensory stimulation to center and incorporate the body into the healing process may be a powerful way for BLM protests to cultivate holistic and generational healing. BLM protests serve the same function—they unfreeze the pain and horror of the aggrieved community and create a narrative of seeking and demanding justice, of finding power for a community left powerless, and of voicing the unheard for the silenced.

Building new associations to old trauma memories is one of the things that helps a person heal their sympathetic nervous system hyperactivity (e.g., increased heart rate, respiration, or blood pressure). Healing such overactivity also has implications for well-being, as chronic exposure to the stress-response system can lead to a myriad of health issues. Barlow (2018) observed a close relationship between mental health, physical health, and intergenerational trauma history among Black Americans, and suggests that interventions aimed at combating intergenerational trauma may also contribute to improving the well-being of Black Americans. Extrasensory integration in spaces of protest could be a transformative process that has the power to support the well-being of Black Americans who have been affected by cultural trauma.

Conclusion

Racial justice movements link the present to a past cultural trauma, reminding the Black community of longstanding historical legacies of oppression and injustice since before the dawn of civil rights. In this chapter we have brought critical spatial theory and the healing spaces framework into conversation to explore how racial justice movements such as BLM can facilitate healing, placemaking, and restoration. By integrating extrasensory pathways that involve the stimulation of visual (e.g., art, color, messages), audio (e.g., call and response, sounds, music, chants),

and emotional stimuli (e.g., hugs, social interactions), physical, verbal, and symbolic forms of protest aim to combat intergenerational trauma in ways that have the potential to support the well-being of Black Americans (Barlow, 2018). Although chronic exposure to racial stressors can negatively impact mental health, reclaiming spaces of oppression by curating sacred spaces of protest allow for holistic healing that can shift trajectories of intergenerational trauma impacts. Racial justice protests integrate multiple sensory pathways that may enable aggrieved Black communities to reframe their trauma and recover their collective power in ways that inspire hope and support collective healing.

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