

2023

Racial Healing in the Church: The Usefulness of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy Model

Winston Seegobin

George Fox University, wseegobin@georgefox.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Seegobin, Winston, "Racial Healing in the Church: The Usefulness of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy Model" (2023). *Faculty Publications - Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) Program*. 354.

https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/gscp_fac/354

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) Program at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) Program by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

Racial Healing in the Church: The Usefulness of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy Model

Winston Seegobin

Graduate School of Clinical Psychology, George Fox University

Racial disunity is a major challenge facing the Christian church. This article examines psychological factors that contribute to and maintain both racial disunity and racial unity through the lens of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model (Sullivan, 1968; Teyber & Teyber, 2017). It looks at how early interpersonal relationships in childhood influence interpersonal relationships as adults and how the therapeutic relationship as a healing influence can be applied to racial healing as adults. Spiritual factors that contribute to and maintain racial disunity and racial unity are also discussed. Understanding that it is the relationship that heals, specific strategies such as understanding the impact of racism, lament, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation are presented (Morrison, 2019; Tisby, 2021). The hope is that we will be able to achieve racial healing in the church and that we will understand and realize that we can heal the racial divide in the church and other Christian institutions.

The racial disunity in the United States and in the Christian Church is disheartening and significantly affects all of us. The purpose of this article is to examine some of the factors that contribute to and maintain racial disunity, and, more importantly, present some of the factors that contribute to and maintain racial unity in the Church. Interpersonal Process in Therapy (Sullivan 1968; Teyber & Teyber, 2017) is presented as a model to understand how racial disunity occurs and also how racial unity can occur. The incarnation as a metaphor for the Interpersonal Process in Therapy as it relates to racial healing is explored. Lastly, specific interventions that assist in building racial unity are presented along with recommendations for future research.

Psychological Factors that Contribute to and Maintain Racial Disunity

Psychological factors that contribute to and maintain racial disunity can be understood through the lens of Interpersonal Psychotherapy (Morgan, 2014; Sullivan, 1968; Sullivan, 1970) and, more recently, the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). The central thrust of the theory and therapy is that early interpersonal relationships influence per-

sonality development and psychopathology, and the therapeutic relationship is the change agent in psychotherapy (Kiesler, 1996). Teyber and Teyber (2017) noted that "Sullivan conceptualized personality as the collection of interpersonal strategies that the individual employs to avoid or minimize anxiety, ward off disapproval, and maintain self-esteem...developed through repetitive interactions with their parents" (p. 23). The implication is that children develop healthy or unhealthy interpersonal patterns from their parents. Unhealthy relational patterns arise from core conflicts that occur as a result of the "combined effects of insecure attachments, problematic child-rearing practices, and faulty structural family relations" (Teyber & Teyber, 2017, p. 224). These ways of relating continue into adulthood and are evident in difficulties in interpersonal relationships as adults. How, then does the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model assist us in understanding racial disunity? Racial disunity is the inability of people from different races or ethnic backgrounds to get along with each other and develop close relationships. How do adults learn these ways of behaving? From an interpersonal perspective, these patterns of behavior started when we were children and, consequently, influence our adult relational patterns, meaning that racial disunity started in our childhood. The literature on children and racism supports this hypothesis. Xiao et al. (2018a) found that babies between the ages of six and twelve months

Author Note

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Winston Seegobin, George Fox University, 414 N. Meridian St., Newberg, OR 97132. Email: wseegobin@georgefox.edu

of age displayed preferences for people from their racial groups. By nine months old, faces from their own race were associated with happy music and faces from other racial groups were associated with sad music (Xiao et al., 2018b). These researchers indicated that these results may be occurring because the children lacked exposure to people of other racial groups, and, unless change occurs, these patterns may continue into adulthood. Yarrow et al. (2013) reported that, "By age 3 or 4, White American children were more likely to associate Black and Asian faces with anger, while rating White faces as having more positive emotions. Black American children did not show the same ingroup preference" (Yarrow et al., 2013, as cited in Weir, 2021, p. 3). Sullivan et al. (2021) concluded from their research about children, race, and parenting that White parents tend to use strategies that may appear to be helpful but do not work well and may even be harmful such as telling children to be "colorblind (e.g., 'Skin color doesn't matter' or 'We're all the same on the inside') and do not discuss race (e.g., 'It's not polite to talk about that')" (p. 399). These researchers also noted that having open discussions about race and racial differences will assist children in greater awareness of racism and make it easier for them to talk about it. The implication of these studies from an interpersonal perspective seems to suggest that our racial disunity may stem from our early childhood experiences of learning consciously or unconsciously about racism toward others who are different from us, which affects our racial disunity as adults in the church.

Another result that can occur from these early childhood experiences is segregation, another factor affecting racial disunity. Lack of exposure and relationships have resulted in people of different races and cultures not desiring to be together, and such experiences have led to formalized segregation where communities and schools are kept separate by race (Emerson & Smith, 2000). This segregation has also hurt the Church, and many Christians do not seem to understand the need for desegregated and integrated communities and, consequently, support segregation (Hawkins, 2021; Tisby, 2019).

The way we raise our children influences their decisions as adults, and the segregation of children in schools has resulted in racism and racial disunity. Even after desegregation was imple-

mented, some people did not support it, as was illustrated in the case of Ruby Bridges. Ruby was one of the first Black students to be introduced to a White school. As was documented in her first day visiting the school, there were significant protests, as White parents reported that they did not want their children interacting with Black children (Coles, 1995). We still see evidence of segregation in churches (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Here is another way the Interpersonal Process of Therapy model can assist us in understanding racial disunity. In this model, core conflicts that arise in childhood experiences result in interpersonal strategies of moving toward, moving against, and moving away (Horney, 1970; Teyber & Teyber, 2017). In the moving toward behavior, the individual seeks to please others and avoid conflicts to reduce anxiety and feel at peace. In the moving against strategy, the individual tries to reduce anxiety by being aggressive and actively doing what pleases them, even at the expense of others. The third strategy, moving away, involves the individual reducing anxiety by reducing expectations of others and seeking to satisfy their own needs without needing the assistance of others. These interpersonal coping strategies often continue into adulthood and affect interpersonal relationships (Teyber & Teyber, 2017).

How might these strategies contribute to or maintain racial disunity? The moving toward strategy for people of color may motivate the individual to minimize the hurt and pain associated with racism and feel a need to please White people. For White people, the experience may motivate them to not acknowledge the effects of racism, and they may avoid discussions or conversations on racism to avoid facing the pain of others. The moving against strategy for people of color may involve them being more active in their response to racism, such as participating in marches, protests, or public discourses so their hurt or pain can be known and heard. They may confront someone who is being racist so that they understand the offensiveness of their behavior. For White people, the moving against strategy may involve feeling justified in their racist behavior and no acknowledgement of their power and privilege. They may feel that their White supremacy behaviors are justified because they believe people of color do not have the same value as themselves. People of

color who adopt the moving away strategy may feel powerless to expect any changes from White people and lower their expectations for change. They may try to ignore racism, hoping that the pain will go away. For White people, the moving away strategy may involve the desire that their racist behaviors be ignored by others and feel that staying away from people of color will avoid any occurrence of racism. They may feel no responsibility for racism and say that it does not exist and, if we can all get along, all will be fine. One can clearly see how all three interpersonal strategies result in racial disunity because interpersonal relationships between the groups are not perceived as necessary. Thus, segregation continues.

Spiritual Factors that Contribute to and Maintain Racial Disunity

We live in a racialized society and, consequently, a racialized Church (Emerson & Smith, 2000). The history of the church in the United States reveals incidents of racial discrimination and racial prejudice, specifically involving White Christians discriminating against Christians of color (Tisby, 2019). Beginning with slave ownership and continuing to the present day, racial disunity within the Church has had, and continues to have, a profound impact on the treatment of people of color. A quick glance at the demographics of the Christian Church demonstrates the inequity in the Body of Christ. Most Christian Mainline Protestant churches have White folks as the majority of the membership (e.g., interdenominational: 73%; Presbyterian U.S.A.: 88%; United Methodist: 94%; Pew Research Center, 2014). Consequently, the leadership structures/systems are set up to benefit White folks. This occurs both in churches and in Christian colleges and universities (Lee et al., 1991; Longman, 2017). The landscape is often discouraging for leaders who are people of color, with few opportunities for advancement. The problem of racism in the church is, at times, disheartening. It is sometimes difficult for White Christians to acknowledge the power and privilege they possess because White supremacy policies and structures are considered the norm in our country (DiAngelo, 2018). Although the book *Divided by Faith* (Emerson & Smith, 2000) was written 22 years ago, the truth of its message is very relevant for our times. Emerson and Smith (2000) wrote,

A racialized society is a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships...a society that allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines, lines that are socially constructed. (p. 7)

Tisby (2019), in his discussion of the system of racism, said, "Christians participated in this system of white supremacy—a concept that identifies white people and white culture as normal and superior—even if they claim people of color as their brothers and sisters in Christ" (p. 16). This inequality and inequity have resulted in racial tensions in the Church and leaves Christians who are people of color feeling "less than" because of the color of their skin and their cultural and ethnic background. Dr. King, in his "I have a dream" speech said, "I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but content of their character" (Washington, 1986, p. 219). This dream is yet to be realized.

Racial disunity has been exacerbated in the last few years as the political landscape has changed and racial tensions have significantly increased with the murders of African Americans (e.g., George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor) and the polarization over political positions and leadership (Singh, 2019). At present, polarization is hurting the Church, especially the Evangelical church, and church attendance and commitment have been reduced. The pandemic resulting from COVID-19 has also contributed to this polarization. As a Christian Church, we have to find our way out of this polarization and racial disunity, and the hope is that the process offered in this article will bring racial healing to the church. Racial healing is urgently needed and may be one of the answers we need for the "racial survival" of the church. The outlook is rather dim, but we have to believe that we can learn to "love one another" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, John 13:34), be the Church that God has called us to be and do the work of racial healing and reconciliation.

Psychological Factors that Contribute to and Maintain Racial Unity

From the Interpersonal Process in Therapy perspective (Kiesler, 1996; Sullivan, 1968; Tey-

ber & Teyber, 2017), the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and the client is the principal avenue of change. It is the therapeutic relationship that brings healing to the client. The therapist provides what is referred to as "the corrective emotional experience" (Alexander & French, 1946; Teyber & Teyber, 2017, p. 10). For this type of corrective emotional experience to occur, the therapist must be personally engaged and emotionally available to the client. The relationship must hold real personal meaning for both of them in order to have the emotional impact that is necessary for change to occur (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). This experience involves the therapist responding in a different manner from what the client has experienced previously in their life and relationships. It involves deep empathy for the patient, which facilitates the therapist getting an "insider's perspective" on the concerns of the client and results in the client feeling deeply understood. Often, compassion is also a part of this intervention. Secondly, as the client plays out in the session with the therapist the conflicts in their other relationships, the therapist does not respond to the client in the usual manner as is expected from the client's previous interpersonal interactions. Instead, the therapist responds with understanding and warmth and provides an atmosphere where the client feels understood and accepted, which becomes a transformative experience. Thirdly, the therapist is personally and emotionally engaged with the client. This deep emotional connection is what makes the therapy work because it helps the therapist to understand the client at a deeply emotional level and helps the client to acknowledge and use that connection to change the way they see themselves. This also enables the client to have better interpersonal relationships outside of the sessions.

How does this understanding of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy relate to racial healing? The bottom line is that "it is the relationship that heals" (Teyber & Teyber, 2017, p. 15). It is the forming of close and emotional relationships with people who are racially different from us that brings racial healing. We become personally involved with each other for racial healing to take place. It occurs within the context of empathy, acceptance, and compassion, and the relationship holds real meaning for both of us. When relationships of this nature occur in

the Church, racial healing and racial unity are the outcomes.

Spiritual Factors that Contribute to and Maintain Racial Unity

DeYoung et al. (2003) presented the answer to racial disunity and segregated churches as multiracial congregations. They emphasized the importance of relationships, saying, "Multicultural congregations can serve as gathering places where whites and persons of color begin to see and relate to each other as human beings" (p. 134). They believed that these places will affirm the self-esteem of everyone in a society where racism separates us. Their model stems from the Church that was formed on the Day of Pentecost (New International Version Bible, 2011, Acts 1-3). Multiracial congregations will definitely build relationships and bring racial unity.

Racial unity also involves acknowledgment of the dignity and worth in each other because we are all made in the image of God. Tisby (2021) noted,

God's fingerprints rest upon every single person without restriction. The image of God extends to Black and White people, men and women, rich and poor, incarcerated and free, queer and straight, documented and undocumented, nondisabled and disabled, powerful and oppressed. All people equally bear the likeness of God and thus possess incalculable and inviolable value. (pp. 27-28)

It is important, then, that we value each other, which is helpful on the path to racial healing.

In John 17 (*New International Version Bible*, 2011), Jesus prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one. He prayed for unity among the believers. What does this unity mean? That we are all the same? Or is He talking about unity in diversity? It is important that we grasp the significance of loving, respecting, and appreciating each other, no matter our background or where we come from, for we will be spending eternity with each other. If we can learn to love each other here, then heaven will be a much better place for us (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Revelation 7:9).

Tisby (2019) noted, "By seeing the roots of racism in this country, may the church be moved to immediate and resolute antiracist action" (pp. 15-16). This author's journey to racial healing started with an antiracism work-

shop with faculty, staff, and administrators at a Christian college presented by D. John Lee, a licensed clinical psychologist. It made a profound impact on the awareness and development of my ethnic identity development, awareness of racism and racial prejudice, and the development of an antiracist stance. An antiracist stance involves taking active steps to reduce or eliminate experiences of racism for individuals and in institutions by working for change in attitudes and behaviors that facilitate equity for people of color and brings healing to relationships between White people and people of color. It also involves working with organizations to have policies that benefit all people, with a focus on equity for people of color (Bryant & Arrington, 2022).

The Incarnation as a Metaphor for Interpersonal Psychotherapy and Racial Healing

Benner (1983) applied the incarnation to psychoanalytic / psychodynamic psychotherapy. The incarnation is the biblical account of God becoming a human being in the person of Christ. This event demonstrates God's identification with us by becoming one of us, identifying with our humanity and limitations (see Hebrews 2:17-18). This incarnational process occurs as the therapist takes on the hurts, pain, and accusations of the client without becoming defensive or retaliating. In a similar manner, this section focuses on the application of the incarnation in clinical work from the interpersonal psychotherapy perspective and its application to racial healing.

The incarnation is the Word becoming flesh, God becoming a human being as Jesus Christ (see John 1:14). Interpersonal psychotherapy becomes incarnational in the following ways (Seegobin & Neff, 2018). First of all, the therapeutic relationship is the vehicle of change. The clinician provides a deep emotional connection with the client. This is accomplished through deep empathy, where the clinician sees the client and their problem from an insider's perspective. Like Christ who identifies with us (see Hebrews 4:15), the clinician identifies deeply with the suffering of the client. When this principle is applied to racial healing, the White Christian identifies with the suffering of the person of color that occurred because of racism, which hurts in profound and perverse ways. This

kind of interaction can cause people of color to feel that White Christians understand what they have experienced and know their pain in the same way that Christ knows our pain because He became a human being. This is the kind of relationship that brings healing to relationships that involve people who are racially diverse. Secondly, the clinician allows the client to reenact in therapy the interpersonal problems that they are facing outside of therapy, but the clinician does not respond in the same problematic way that others have in the past. Like Christ in the incarnation, the clinician accepts the client where they are and responds without condemnation. How can this principle be applied to racial healing? Acceptance of the other is key. In this interaction, change occurs because the White Christian is willing to hear the hurt, pain, and deep emotions of people of color, including feelings of anger, and not become defensive or withdraw or minimize the experience. Instead, they lean into the experience and hear the pain without judgment or condemnation. This kind of interaction brings healing to relationships because "it is the relationship that heals."

Thirdly, the clinician provides a corrective emotional experience in which clients experience a new and more satisfying response to their conflicts than they have received in the past. The clinician becomes personally engaged and emotionally available to the client. The relationship holds real personal meaning for both clinician and client in order to have the emotional impact for change to occur. Like the incarnation, the clinician's response is transformative because it brings change, healing, and restoration to the client (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). In this third application of the incarnation, racial healing occurs because of the emotional depth of the relationship. The White Christians allow themselves to be "personally engaged and emotionally available" to people of color. Such a relationship causes people of color to feel valued and understood and brings healing to relationships. Racial healing and unity occur because of the strong emotional bond that is formed between White folks and people of color.

Specific Strategies that Promote Racial Healing: It is the Relationship That Heals

In this section, a program for racial healing is described based on the Interpersonal Process in

Therapy perspective and focuses on the importance of interpersonal relationships between White people and people of color as the healing agent (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). This program is best conducted in a racially mixed (White people and people of color) small group (15-20 people) in a church setting, where the group meets weekly for one hour. Alternatively, the program can also be conducted as a one-day workshop. It would benefit the group to have two leaders (a person of color and a White person) who are sensitive to racial concerns, have experienced racial healing themselves, and are open to hearing differing viewpoints with the goal of healing relationships and bringing people together. The sessions involve both psychoeducation, where information is presented, and discussion so that all voices are heard. The mechanism of change in this program is the close interpersonal relationships that occur with the goal that relationships are healed and racial unity is developed. The program has elements that will create discomfort for both White people and people of color because of the sharing of strong emotions. The hope is that the discomfort will lead to genuine and lasting change. The sessions in this program, described below, are as follows: understanding the impact of racism, lament, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Mason, 2018; Morrison, 2019; Tisby, 2019, Tisby, 2021). These sessions build on each other to accomplish the ultimate goal of racial healing and reconciliation for White people and people of color. This program is unique in its application of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model to racial healing with the biblical elements of healing (e.g., confession, forgiveness). The major goal is to have racial healing occur as a result of the healing of interpersonal relationships between White people and people of color. Although this program may work with any group, it will work best in a church setting or with people for whom the Christian faith is important. The next sections describe the content for each of the five sessions (psychoeducation) and the discussion questions for application of the content.

Understanding the Impact of Racism

In order to engage the racial healing process, the first session promotes an understanding of the impact of racism in the United States and the role that the American Church has played

in racism and racial disunity. Tisby (2019) documented some of the ways that the Church's early response to racism was not helpful for people of color. This session explores the significant impact of systemic racism and the lingering effects at present on people of color. Questions addressed include, How does the Church and institutional Christianity respond to racism and the plight of people of color? How can we understand the racial divide that we see and experience now? Racism has produced significant hurt and pain from individuals, systems, institutions, and communities. For example, one of the lingering experiences from our history was the decision by the Federal Government to give housing loans to White veterans after World War II, but did not make those loans available to veterans who were people of color. Housing communities such as in Levittown, New Jersey, segregated White people from Black people and provided opportunities for White people to gather wealth for themselves and their children. These opportunities were not made available to Black people who were ushered in to live in dilapidated tenement buildings in the urban areas in the city (Simons, 2020). A clip from the PBS video series *Race: The Power of an Illusion - Episode 2: The House We Live In* can be shown to highlight this event (Rogow, 2003). This decision by the Federal Government to not give financial backing to people of color stopped their path to upward mobility. The impact of those decisions is with us today, as is evident in the economic disparities between the majority of White individuals and Black individuals (Adelman, 2003).

Another example to be used in this session as an example of the painful history of racism in the United States is an incident that occurred on Sunday, September 15, 1963, at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. Four young girls were killed when a bomb went off at the church. Four people from a White supremacist group were suspects but were not convicted (Guardian, n.d.).

In order to effectively understand the racial healing process, we need to understand the racial disunity that has been present in our country for decades. Understanding racial disunity involves empathy and compassion for what has happened to marginalized people. A cognitive understanding of racism and racial discrimination is helpful, but I believe greater lasting

change can occur when there is an emotional understanding and response to the experiences of racism and racial disunity in our country and particularly in the Church. Compassion opens the door for us to not only hear the pain of our sisters and brothers of color, but to feel the pain.

For example, this author was in an antiracism training workshop where the President of a university was present. This person was so moved by the effects of racial disunity and hurt that they changed as an individual and as the leader of the university. A deep understanding of White privilege and the struggles of people of color resulted in greater investment from the President in programs and strategies to assist people of color, such as the recruitment of people of color for leadership positions at the university and financial support for programs focused on people of color. It was as though "their eyes were opened" and they could no longer ignore the importance of diversity and cared deeply for the students, staff, and faculty of color. Antiracism training, where strategies are developed to reduce/eliminate racism, and racial healing training work when they can be experienced at an emotional level.

An exercise on racial memory can be helpful in better understanding the impact of racism. As an application of the content of this session, individuals are asked by the leaders to share their perceptions of how systemic and institutional racism have affected the church and relationships for Christians. Large pieces of poster paper are made available where individuals can write racist events that they can recall from their community, the Church, and their country. After this exercise is completed, participants are asked to walk around the room and observe what has been written. Then, a discussion of the content of the posters is conducted, with the intention that this will lay the groundwork for the next session on lament.

Lament

This session begins with biblical examples of lament. The concept of lament comes from the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament. Jeremiah lamented over the sins of the Israelites and their decision to not follow God. Psalm 51 is a lament from King David after he was told by the prophet Nathan that he had sinned against God by his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. Morrison (2019) described it this way:

To lament means to express sorrow or regret. Lamenting something horrific that has taken place allows a deep connection to form between the person lamenting and the harm that was done, and that emotional connection is the first step in creating a pathway for healing and hope. We have to sit in the sorrow, avoid trying to fix it right away, avoid our attempts to make it all okay. Only then is the pain useful. Only then can it lead us into healing and wisdom. (p. 39)

Lament can be a healing experience for us all as we acknowledge the harm that was done to people of color, in the past and present, and deep sorrow for this experience (Mason, 2018). In this session, the leaders can have the individuals reflect on the inequity and the hurts experienced by people of color presented in the previous session. They can also highlight the incidents of racism that were written on the poster boards. Then, they can explain that lamenting is expressing deep sorrow for the racist experiences of people of color and the pain that occurred. The leaders can provide space where weeping can occur and hurt can be expressed and empathy provided. The weeping and empathy are expressions that fit with the incarnational experience in the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model. Jesus wept and expressed sorrow when He saw Mary and Martha after their brother Lazarus had died (see John 11:35). He showed us an example of "weeping with others" as they hurt.

This session focusing on lament can bring people of different races together because it facilitates the experiencing of the deep pain of each other and the wrongs that have been done to people of color, sometimes in the name of Christ. An example that can be shared with the group is how White Christians in the Southern United States supported segregation and White supremacy even after the Civil Rights movement was established. They continued to segregate their homes, Churches, and other institutions (Hawkins, 2021).

The discussion at the end of this session can focus on questions such as, What are your feelings about the inequity and hurt suffered by people of color? Segregation was supported by Christians in the past. How can you lament for segregation happening in the present? And how can you continue to leave space for yourselves and provide space for others to continue to lament? Lament sets us up for the next step in the healing process that involves confession.

Confession

In this third session, the focus is on how lament leads to confession, an acknowledgement of the disparities that have existed and continue to exist between White people and people of color in the Church. Biblical examples from the Old Testament include both Moses and Daniel who made confessions before God on behalf of the sin of the Israelites. Although we may not have been the perpetrators of racism and racial discrimination, we may be beneficiaries of the inequities and systemic racism that provided privilege for some and hurt for others. Therefore, in this session, participants are encouraged to confess their sins of racism as well as the sins of their ancestors. Confession can involve White people taking communal responsibility for the effects of both individual and systemic racism on people of color. And people of color can listen and receive the confession of White people. These mutual expressions involved in confession can assist in the building of relationships as folks are drawn closer because they feel understood.

Confession can also involve acknowledgement of occasions when White people did not take action or were silent when wrongs were being done to people of color. Often referred to as the sin of omission (not doing what is good or helpful), it focuses on what was not done to assist people of color. Dr. King, in his letter from the Birmingham City Jail, wrote, "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people" (Washington, 1986, p. 296). It seems like confession of this sin can draw people together in racial unity, because it helps people of color to feel that their experiences are understood by White people. This experience mirrors what occurs in the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model where the therapist has a deep understanding of the patient that helps the patient to feel understood in the sessions and leads to the patient feeling understood in other relationships.

At the end of the session, an exercise on confession can be helpful and responses to the following questions can facilitate discussion in the group: As Christians, what do we need to confess about racist incidents and experiences? As a community, what are recent experiences of racism that you want to confess communally

because you were silent and ignored the hurts of your sisters and brothers of color? When are times when you were silent when a racist incident happened to a person of color, and what would you do differently now that you no longer want to be silent? How can your confession build stronger relationships and racial unity?

Forgiveness

In this fourth session, the focus is on forgiveness as a response to confession. As we reflect on the place of forgiveness in the healing process, the question can be asked, How can we forgive such heinous crimes committed against humanity and especially people of color, in light of the continued experiences of racism and racial disunity in our country, churches, and institutions? We choose forgiveness because it frees us from the heavy burden of unforgiveness and strengthens our relationship with God and one another. Ephesians 4:32 (*New International Version Bible*, 2011) says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you." In the Incarnation, as Christ was dying on the cross, he offered forgiveness to those who were killing him (Luke 23:34).

It is important to note that forgiveness cannot be demanded by White people. It has to be voluntarily given by people of color when they are ready to forgive. For some offenses, this forgiveness has to come from God's strength and assistance because it is humanly impossible to forgive. Scripture teaches us that forgiveness builds and restores relationships (see Colossians 3:13).

Improved relationships will help in the healing process, as we acknowledge that it is the relationship that heals (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). Morrison (2019) described seeking and extending forgiveness as "the healing balm" (p.101). This can be a difficult step for people of color if confession and taking responsibility do not happen. Forgiveness does not involve minimizing the pain of racism or the effects of racism. As people of color, we acknowledge how we have been hurt by the perpetrators of racism and we choose to forgive as Christ forgave us. It can involve decisional forgiveness or emotional forgiveness (Worthington, 2009). Forgiveness can bring healing. We can give forgiveness as well as receive forgiveness. We, too, can forgive as Christ forgave us (see Colossians 3:13).

Revisiting the experiences of Ruby Bridges during the time when schools were beginning to be desegregated, Coles (1995) discussed his observations of her entering the school during significant protests with people from the crowd hurling insults at her. He observed her lips moving as she approached the door of the school. Her teacher also noticed her lips moving. Later in an interview with Ruby, Coles asked Ruby what she was muttering as she entered the school; that is, whether she was trying to communicate with the crowd. Ruby reported that she was talking to God, and this is what she said: "Please God forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." Coles reported that she had learned forgiveness from her father, mother, and pastor (Coles, 1995).

A more recent example of forgiveness for a horrific racial crime relates to the incident that occurred on June 17, 2015, when Dylann Roof went to the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charlottesville, South Carolina, and shot nine people (Nahorniak, 2015). This incident caused much pain and suffering. It is difficult to understand how forgiveness could occur for such a horrific crime. Yet, newspaper accounts of the family members of the deceased and their responses are beyond understanding in their desire to follow Christ. The details of this experience are shared not as an example to follow, but for us to hear the pain and power of forgiveness. At the trial of Dylann Roof, the judge asked family members of the deceased if they wanted to say anything. This is the response of one family member as reported by Mary Nahorniak in *USA Today* on June 19, 2015:

The daughter of Ethel Lance, one of the nine church members killed on Wednesday, was the first family member to speak. She spoke softly and with emotion. "I forgive you. You took something really precious away from me. I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you and have mercy on your soul. It hurts me, it hurts a lot of people but God forgive you and I forgive you."

Other examples of family members who also forgave Roof can be found in the *USA Today* article mentioned above. Examples such as that of Ruby Bridges, Mary Nahorniak, and others can be shared in this session as examples of forgiveness.

Interpersonal relationships can heal when we forgive each other. Racial healing can occur

when we forgive. For the proposed program, here are some questions to consider as an exercise in forgiveness for this session. Responses to the questions can be discussed as a group. What makes the forgiveness of racist experiences difficult? What facilitates the process of forgiveness? What makes the demanding of forgiveness difficult? What are some of the ways that God can help you to forgive? What can you learn from the families of the people who were shot by Dylann Roof? How can you respond when you are forgiven?

Reconciliation

After understanding the impact of racism, lament, confession, and forgiveness comes reconciliation, one of the most difficult parts of the racial healing process and the topic for our fifth session. Reconciliation involves the healing of relationships, which is the central thrust of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy model. It is the relationship that heals (Teyber & Teyber, 2017). The compassionate and empathic relationship that the therapist has with the client usually brings healing to the client because it demonstrates to the client that they have inherent worth and provides a "corrective emotional experience" for the client. In racial reconciliation, it can be helpful if the White person validates the inherent worth of the person of color and moves toward them. Racial reconciliation is also facilitated when the person of color moves toward the White person. This is a picture of two people extending their hands for a handshake or arms for a hug. These kinds of visible exchanges often characterize the presence of a relationship and facilitate reconciliation. Another example of reconciliation is the Incarnation (explained earlier in this article), where God extends Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ, desiring a close relationship with us as He identifies with us and wants us to identify with Him and resulting in a close bond between us (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Through Christ, we have reconciliation in our relationship with God and are able to be reconciled with each other. Racial reconciliation can be a longer process that takes more time and effort to achieve. However, it results in racial healing, racial unity, and a stronger and more diverse or multiracial church.

Racial reconciliation can also be fostered by building relationships. Tisby (2021) noted, "Peo-

ple need a personal motivation to disrupt the regular patterns of racism in their own lives and in society. Often it is a relationship or friendship that changes a person's perspective" (p. 87). Christian relationships can be built through lamentation in worship, corporate confession of the sin of racism, acknowledgement of the Church's racial history, and reconciliation with people that the Church has harmed through its racism. Relationships can also be built through humility, listening, and emotional connections (Tisby, 2021). In this context, humility is communicating as equals and a willingness to learn from others and about others who are different. Listening without judgment is also an important aspect of relationship building. The emotional connection is the glue that holds them all together, making them work well, and often results in reconciliation, in particular, racial reconciliation.

At the end of this session, the leaders can summarize the impact of racism on society and the church and the usefulness of lament, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation in the racial healing journey. Here are some suggested questions for discussion: What do you need for racial reconciliation to occur? What are your next steps in this process? What questions have come up for you? How are you feeling about the racial disunity and inequity seen in your society and in the Church, and what do you want to do about it to bring about change? How can we walk together on this journey of racial healing? For Christians, Christ is our example. How do we love one another with Christ's love?

Future Research

The model of the Interpersonal Process in Therapy and its integration with both racial disunity and racial unity needs further study, as this model needs to be empirically tested to determine its efficacy in racial healing. Additionally, the use of the incarnation as a metaphor for the Interpersonal Process in Therapy and a racially healing process needs to be further investigated. Further empirical research on the validity of the model of understanding the impact of racism, lament, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation as leading to racial healing needs to be implemented and its efficacy tested with pre- and post-measures of racial prejudice, closeness of interpersonal relationships, and authentic and genuine reconciliation.

Summary

This article focused on racial healing in the Church and presented a model of the integration of the Interpersonal Process of Therapy with racial disunity and racial unity. Spiritual factors that influence racial disunity and racial unity were also explored. The application of the incarnation as a metaphor for the Interpersonal Process in Therapy and racial healing was explored. A program that involved understanding the impact of racism, lament, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Morrison, 2019; Tisby, 2021) was presented that included exercises to apply for each topic. Future empirical research is needed to determine the efficacy of this model.

References

- Adelman, L. (2003). *Race: The power of an illusion*. California Newsreel.
- Alexander, F., & French, T. M. (1946). *Psychoanalytic therapy*. Ronald Press.
- Benner, D. G. (1983). The incarnation as a metaphor for psychotherapy. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 11(4), 287-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009164718301100401>.
- Bryant, T., & Arrington, E. G. (2022). *The antiracism handbook: Practical tools to shift the mindset and uproot racism in your life and community*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Coles, R. (1995). *Listening to children: A moral journey with Robert Coles*. [Film]. PBS Video.
- DeYoung, C. P., Emerson, M. O., Yancey, G., & Chai Kim, K. (2003). *United by faith: The multiracial congregation as an answer to the problem of race*. Oxford University Press.
- DiAngelo, R. J. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Emerson, M. O., & Smith, C. (2000). *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America*. Oxford University Press.
- Guardian. (n.d.). *From the archive, 16 September 1963: Black church bombed in Birmingham, Alabama*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/16/16th-street-baptist-church-birmingham-alabama-1963>.
- Hawkins, J. R. (2021). *The Bible told them so: How Southern Evangelicals fought to preserve White supremacy*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197571064.001.0001>.
- Horney, K. (1970). *Neurosis and human growth*. Norton.

- Kiesler, D. J. (1996). *Contemporary interpersonal theory and research: Personality, psychopathology and psychotherapy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Lee, D. J., Nieves, A. L., & Allen, H. L. (Eds.) (1991). *Ethnic minorities and evangelical Christian colleges*. University Press of America.
- Longman, K. A. (2017). *Diversity matters: Race, ethnicity, and the future of Christian higher education*. Abilene Christian University Press.
- Mason, E. (2018). *Woke church: An urgent call for Christians in America to confront racism and injustice*. Moody Publishers.
- Morgan, J. H. (2014). The interpersonal psychotherapy of Harry Stack Sullivan: Remembering the legacy. *Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 4(6), 162. <http://doi.org/10.4172/2161-0487.1000162>.
- Morrison, L. (2019). *Be the bridge: Pursuing God's heart for racial reconciliation*. Waterbrook.
- Nahorniak, M. (2015, June 19). Families to Roof: May God 'have mercy on your soul.' *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/06/19/bond-court-dylann-roof-charleston/28991607/>
- New International Version Bible*. (2011). Zondervan.
- Pew Research Center. (2014, May). *Racial and ethnic composition among mainline Protestants by religious denomination*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/compare/racial-and-ethnic-composition/by/religious-denomination#racial-and-ethnic-composition>.
- Rogow, F. (2003). *Race: The power of an illusion*. California Newsreel and Independent Television Service.
- Seegobin, W., & Neff, M. A. (2018, April). *The incarnation as a metaphor for interpersonal psychotherapy: Clinical application and demonstration* [Conference presentation]. Annual Conference of the Christian Association for Psychological Studies, Norfolk, VA, United States.
- Simons, M. (2020). *The legacy of Levittown: What the Post-WWII suburbanization of Long Island reveals about the racial wealth gap today. The First-Year Papers (2010 - present)*. Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford, CT. <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/fypapers/109>.
- Singh, A. A. (2019). *The racial healing handbook: Practical activities to help you challenge privilege, confront systemic racism and engage in collective healing*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1968). *The interpersonal theory of psychiatry*. Norton.
- Sullivan, H. S. (1970). *The psychiatric interview*. Norton.
- Sullivan, J., Wilton, L., & Apfelbaum, E. P. (2021). Adults delay conversations about race because they underestimate children's processing of race. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 150(2), 395-400. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000851>.
- Teyber, E., & Teyber, F. H. (2017). *Interpersonal process in therapy: An integrative model* (7th ed.). Cengage.
- Tisby, J. (2019). *The color of compromise: The truth about the American church's complicity in racism*. Zondervan.
- Tisby, J. (2021). *How to fight racism: Courageous Christianity and the journey toward racial justice*. Zondervan.
- Washington, J. M. (Ed.). (1986). *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Harper.
- Weir, K. (2021). Raising anti-racist children. *Monitor on Psychology*, 52(4), 52-61.
- Worthington, E. L. (2009). *A just forgiveness: Responsible healing without excusing injustice*. InterVarsity Press.
- Xiao, N. G., Quinn, P. C., Liu, S., Liezhong, G., Pascalls, O., & Lee, K. (2018a). Older but not younger infants associate own-race faces with happy music and other-race faces with sad music. *Developmental Science*, 21(2), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12537>.
- Xiao, N. G., Wu, R., Quinn, P. C., Liu, S., Tummeltshammer, K. S., Kirkham, N. Z., Ge, L., Pascalis, O., & Lee, K. (2018b). Infants rely more on gaze clues from own-race than other-race adults for learning under uncertainty. *Child Development*, 89(3), 229-244. <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fcdev.12798>.
- Yarrow, D., Chen, E. E., & Benaji, M. R. (2013). Two signatures of implicit intergroup attitudes: Developmental invariance and early enculturation. *Psychological Science*, 24(6), 860-868. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612463081>.

Author

Winston Seegobin (PsyD, Clinical Psychology, Central Michigan University) is Director of Diversity and Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Graduate School of Clinical Psychology at George Fox University. His areas of research include multicultural psychotherapy, faith integration, and international psychology.