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The Paranoid-Schizoid Position and Envious Attacks on the Black Other

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the baby's annihilation anxiety and dependence on the m/other are metaphorically paralleled to the colonial White-self's annihilation anxiety and dependence on the Black-slave-other. In so doing, I demonstrate how White defenses developed and are perpetually acted-out in the White-Black dichotomy. This parallel requires an historical exploration of the creation of the concept of "Whiteness" and the corresponding constructs of White superiority and Black inferiority. Colonial White males were societally and legally sanctioned to utilize enslaved Blacks for their dependency and survival needs; this resulted in quelling annihilation anxieties. These psychological dynamics persist today through transgenerational transmission. As a result, the Black person has been psychically mutated into a servile part-object "black body." Thus, when the black body does not gratify the various dependency needs of the entitled White other, envious attacks on the Black other ensue, to inferiorize the Black other, which restores White psychic equilibrium. I elucidate these dynamics with clinical material using Klein's theory of the paranoid-schizoid position; specifically, how annihilation anxiety, dependency, loss, and paranoia in the infant parallel similar psychic experiences in the colonial White male and his White female counterpart, and show how such dynamics persist in present day White relations to Blacks.

KEYWORDS

Envious Attack; Black; white

"First you must survive." ~Sandra Hershberg

Psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Beverly Stoute (2017) took up the study of Black ethnicity in the field of psychoanalysis by focusing on the lack of attention among psychoanalysts on the topic of racism. Her work has added to the growing momentum of psychoanalytic discussions of racism—what psychoanalyst Dorothy Holmes (2016) aptly terms "cultural imposed trauma" (p. 641). Dionne Powell adds to the compendium of study of racism by illuminating how "collective silence" about Black people and racism in the United States (US) permeates and impacts our academic and training institutions (Powell, 2019). Even so, work focusing on the lived dynamics of US racism is relatively scant when you consider the embodied nature of such conflicts in our patients. Additionally, confronting the trauma of slavery and the primitive¹ psychological sequelae created in both the offended and offender are extremely challenging. Thus, it is not surprising these traumas are avoided and often laid solely at the feet of the offended to examine, contain, bear, and articulate the pain inflicted. This might help explain the historic lack of interest or resistance toward the study of US racism and its history in our field.² Particularly, the aforementioned reasons likely contribute to the sparse attention that has been given to the lasting culturally imposed trauma of slavery and its impact on the mind and behavior of White Americans (Gump, 2010). Focusing on the source of racism will yield us better understanding and outcomes than solely focusing on the symptoms of

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¹Primitive in this paper refers to the very earliest functioning of the mind (Hinshelwood, 1994). It is not used to connote negative meaning as it has been utilized to derogate "others."

²According to the American Psychoanalytic Association, only 24 of our 3000 members are Black (Fuller et al., 1999).

racism. For example, by not examining the defensive constellation of various aspects of racialization, such as the creation of “Whiteness” and how it has been transgenerationally passed, obviates our understanding of the impact on the psyche and behavior of White people.

Attorney Cheryl I. Harris (1993) speaks of the colonial American creation of Whiteness as privilege that is based on the fixed false beliefs of White superiority and Black inferiority. This White and Black, good and bad splitting parallels the paranoid-schizoid style of thinking in which the Whiteself is good and the Black self is bad. The defenses used in the paranoid-schizoid position, such as splitting, are helpful organizing mechanisms at the beginning of life as the baby tries to make sense of the vast terror and chaos of early life. For the baby, the world is separated into either all good or all bad. All good belongs to me, for as long as the infant can hold onto it, and all bad belongs to the other when there is a breakdown and breakthrough of terror and dread. However, these mechanisms are limiting and dangerous if overly resorted to in adult life. It is hoped, that over time, if all goes well in the object relations of the infant, the good and bad parts of the self and the other are integrated and the self and other are recognized as whole people with good and bad attributes. Klein labeled this integration of good and bad the depressive position. However, if this process of defense and ego development does not go well, the adult is more vulnerable to shifting into the paranoid-schizoid position. The defenses relied on in this position “militates against understanding” even when the White person or our patients say they want to understand (Joseph, 1983, p. 291) racialized dynamics.

Psychoanalyst Adrienne Harris (2012) explains more about the experience of “Whiteness” as “Deeper than depression, deeper than rage, there is a blankness . . . ” (p. 206). The intoxicating influence of Whiteness creates a vapid space in which thinking is impeded—defended against. Such defense structures obscure the ability to accurately perceive reality and, up until recently, have stifled curiosity about the psychological impact of slavery on Whites, both male and female. For these reasons, there remains a lack of acknowledgment and understanding of how the forced persistent illusory perception of White male superiority negatively and painfully impacts many White Americans’ intra-psychic experience, developing ego, observing ego, and interpersonal relatedness. These ideas of White superiority have become so consistently and deeply embedded in the individual and collective American psyche that this pervasive, delusional process is neither recognized nor labeled as such. For psychoanalysts, this unanalyzed and unmetabolized material, baked into the US psyche creates blind spots and missed opportunities for accurate transference and countertransference observations and interpretations that can impact the quality of our conceptualization, work, and treatment.

There are many aspects of US racialization. This discussion is focused on analyzing the development of a belief in a superior White self, built on the utilization and diminution of enslaved African people and their descendants, to the degree of reducing Black people into “black bodies”. These powerful delusions deserve our analytic curiosity and exploration. I use Klein’s theories to explore these delusions and how and why White superiority is continually recapitulated, thus, maintained. To do so, I address and briefly examine the following: the colonial White male and the development of his early defensive structure, how the belief in White superiority holds the White ego together, and how the defenses and behaviors of Whiteness include the morphing of the Black person into a part-object, black body. To stay close to the psychoanalytic, I draw on dyadic and group clinical material to illustrate how the colonial mindset is alive today in various derivative forms. Thus, in line with the work of psychiatrist Franz Fanon (1952) I demonstrate the unique power of psychoanalytic thought to analyze racialized power dynamics in the US White mind.

Melanie Klein, Envy and Envious Attack and the Delusion of Whiteness

“The Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.” ~Franz Fanon

As with all unconscious material, manifestations of repressed dynamics push-through into awareness. A number of psychoanalytically informed contributors (Akhtar, 2012; Dalal, 2006; Davids, 2011; Hooks, 2003; Leary, 2007; Pogue White, 2013) have diligently worked to raise into consciousness and process the impact of slavery on the collective American psyche. Many theorists have found Klein's theories of splitting, projection and projective identification particularly useful in explaining the dynamics between Black and White people in the US. Theorists who have demonstrated the utility of the Kleinian concepts of envy and envious attack include Chester Pierce's (1970) codification of "microaggressions" as the subtle and pervasive attacks by Whites to subjugate Blacks to maintain White superiority, Narendra Keval's (2016) description of a *Racist State of Mind* in which Black people are utilized to displace "White envy" (pg. 17), Adrienne Harris's (2019) observation of the black male body being simultaneously desired, envied, needed, and feared; and Robin Diangelo's (2018) label of "White Fragility" to describe White people's anxiety and lack of ego strength when confronted with the reality of racism. These object-related expositions are mentioned to acknowledge the more recent written work aimed to show the repetitive continuum of aggressions utilized by White people, towards Blacks to defend their superior status quo; however, such writings have a long and consistent history (Douglass, 1845; Washington, 1901). Extending the ideas of Klein and these authors, I postulate that when White people are not able to freely steal what they want and need from Black people, Whites enviously attack. This ability to attack—steal from and debase Blacks—is inextricably dependent upon the belief, maintenance, and sanctioning of inferiorizing the Black other. Blacks may also envy Whites, but that is not what I am writing about here. In fact, there is compelling evidence that although Blacks could have enviously attacked Whites on countless occasions, it appears Blacks want safety, equity, and opportunity (Taylor, 2013) versus the destructive reactions to envy.

As a result of the 13th Amendment, Black people are not theoretically able to be owned and forced into subordinate positions. Nonetheless, the dynamics preceding the 13th Amendment are ingrained in US culture, which contribute to the conflicts that have become more frequent and evident as the ethnic demographics of the nation rapidly change. These demographic shifts cause White anxiety to rise. This anxiety occurs most noticeably when people who are Black, or appear to be, enter what attorney S. Fields calls *white spaces*. These include our neighborhoods, political arenas, training, and educational environments (Fields, 2019). Particularly, the Black people, who present as peer equals or leaders in these spaces, challenge and threaten the boundaries of White space and supremacy—an owned White entitlement (Harris, 1993). Whites are gradually losing their privileged status, illusory superiority, inclusive of the right to freely utilize, steal from, and control³ Black peoples' responses to the insolent White thefts of Black intellect, dignity, skills, earnings, and bodies. When I think of what is transpiring for Whites, I think of how it is one of the most difficult human experiences to lose something of which one has become accustomed. No longer being able to totally control Blacks activates significant anxiety and paranoia in many Whites. Ta-Nehesi Coates, a Black father compelled by love for an other, writes to his 15 year old son to teach him how White paranoia and thefts from Black people occur daily in the entrenchment of racialized US life. He laments how Whites defend against their anxieties by *believing* they have the authoritarian right to "entrap" him and destroy what they perceive to be an inhuman "Black body," if that body even "resents" such capture (Coates, 2015, p. 9). Coates, attuned to this contemptible phenomenon, repeatedly experiences Black people in America being split into part-objects and objectified bodies rather than being responded to as whole human beings. Coates' letter was inspired by James Baldwin, who six decades prior wrote, "the Negro-in-America is a form of insanity which overtakes white men. In this long battle . . . the white man's motive was the protection of his identity . . ." (Glaude, 2020, p. 41)."

Harris (2012), explains that in the psychic experience of Whiteness, there is an absence of an other, which is similar to Klein's paranoid-schizoid functioning. For White superiority to be established and now maintained, utilization and destruction of an other is required. In both Whiteness and the paranoid-schizoid position, there is the void of an other. Klein explains that the paranoid-schizoid

³Control can be on a continuum of behavior from being unwelcoming, belittling, terrorizing, and killing Black people.

position is a space we shift into when we experience survival vulnerability. In this state of mind, unless the other is gratifying, h/she is felt to be bad—dangerous. She explains that “the bad object is not only kept apart from the good one but its very existence is denied . . . ” (Klein, 1946, p. 102). This primitive emotional patterned experience, inclusive of massive theft from the *needed* Black other, is activated in the Black-White dyad as a result of the violent history and tradition of slavery. The inability to easily subjugate the Black other or exploit the once freely enjoyed entitlements of Black goodness in the colonial environment, is experienced, in the present day, as a significant loss. For some Whites, the accompanying discomfort, fear, confusion, and rage, at times, leads to extreme levels of violence (Morrison, 2017).

Transgenerational Transmission of the US Psychic Construct of “Whiteness”: a Brief History of the Colonial White Male

“We live in a society of an imposed forgetfulness, a society that depends on public amnesia.”

~Angela Davis

The intent of this brief historical exploration is to understand the defensive roots of the early defensive system developed to survive while establishing a newborn nation dependent on enslaved labor. For the most part, colonial Americans have been romanticized. I interpret this as a defensive idealization of the colonial male, which prevented a realistic portrayal of him as both good and bad. Another way to view this is that the colonial males who have been “remembered” were the elite males, while the majority-common colonial males have been “forgotten” and split off from the White collective psyche; I think this forgotten fate also happens to present day disenfranchised US White citizens. Historical data indicate that a large portion of colonizers were arguably psychically vulnerable people before arriving in the colonies (Battalora, 2013; Williams, 1994). This vulnerability naturally persisted as this diverse group of mostly men (and some women) worked to establish the basic needs of survival and build a nation in the difficult environment of the colonies. Though some of these immigrants were brilliant, free, independent adventurers, many of them were semi-captive people, used by their respective governments to work the newly occupied lands for governmental claim and monetary gain.

A substantial amount of the colonies were populated by Scottish and Irish men (Bergard, 2007; Jordan, 1968). These Scottish and Irish people, who were defeated by the English, as well as populations of convicts, became leading exports to the land labelled the New World (Allen, 1994; Meltzer, 1993) which, of course, was not new to the Native inhabitants. The colonies became an outpost where English officials could send their unwanted and unemployed subjects (Allen, 1994; Meltzer, 1993). In the decades before 1680, ample documentation details how these poor and disenfranchised European immigrants worked at similar levels of subservience alongside the free Blacks present in the colonies (Morgan, 1975, 1998; Parent, 2003; Rowe, 1989).

A turning point in the similarities of treatment between poor Whites and Blacks occurred around 1678 after Bacon’s Rebellion. Nathaniel Bacon, a White landowner wanted to take over more land inhabited by the Native American people; however, the Governor of Virginia refused to authorize this. Hence, Bacon, by offering false promises of freedom, organized enslaved Blacks and poor White bond laborers to band together to fight the elite landowners who controlled property ownership through law (Alexander, 2010; Allen, 1994). This rebellion resulted in the first successful colonial settlement, Jamestown, being burned to the ground. This alarmed the landowners of the potential power and threat posed by poor bond laboring Whites unifying with Blacks. What followed were various tactics to split *all* Whites from Blacks by affording systemic privileges to poor Whites (Alexander, 2010; Allen, 1994; Horne, 2014). A prime example includes the passage of the Virginia “Act Concerning Servants and Slaves” (1705), which gave Whites the legal right to murder Black slaves, specifically stating:

If any slave resists his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such incident had never happened: . . . (Section XXXIV).

It is important to note that the majority of Black people in the colonies were enslaved, so Blacks who were free could easily be confused with the enslaved. About a hundred years later, The Homestead Act of 1862 offered small portions of land, cheaply sold or given away to White American laboring-class settlers ([Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 2nd Session](#)). The explicit purpose of this act was to “preserve to free White labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil of my own race and own color can live . . .” ([Congressional Globe, 29th Congress, 2nd Session](#), p. 317).

The racial construct of “White”, connoting murderous and financial superiority over Black people, was the first government entitlement distributed in this burgeoning nation. These systemic methods effectively accorded a selected male group into a more favorable position to dominate and achieve utilizing the most phrenologically and culturally different other (Allen, 1994; Harris, 2019; Suchet, 2007). For some Whites, this other was conflictually needed *and* a known and feared competitor. For this reason, Blacks involved in building the egos and economies of Whites needed to be controlled. One such control was to persistently subjugate Black people by perceiving them as not deserving equitable thought, care and treatment—a view which persists today. This type of subjugation requires Black people to possess less authority, power, intellect, education, income, wealth, beauty, etc. When this power dynamic is disturbed by a Black person who has more than the White other, that Black person is no longer gratifying⁴ the White ego ideal and ideas. Psychically vulnerable Whites whocome into contact with this type of Black-White dynamic in which they are not superior can protectively alternate into the paranoid-schizoid position to preserve and reinstate their psychicequilibrium. While in this primitive position, when the Black other does not genuflect as expected and needed by the fragile White ego, the Black other is experienced in phantasy as bad and threateningthus is attacked to reinstate psychic balance.

Historically, for example, White males in the harsh psychological and physical environments of colonial settlements feared defeat and death. This annihilation threat could cause some of these White males to oscillate to the paranoid-schizoid position in which the Black other was utilized for survival. In this position the phantasied good White male feels entitled to appropriate all Black goodness for himself and his White companions. The aggression and destruction persist in what has now become the phantasied bad Black object who is conflictedly needed for survival yet feared he will attack. If this Black other does not obsequiously give of his/her resources (i.e., goodness), the White male experiences intense rage and fear of what the Black other has, resulting in the experience of envy. He copes with these intense feelings by enviously attacking the now phantasied bad and feared persecutory Black other. In the mind of the White male, the Black person is a mere part-object, functioning body, and an owned narcissistic extension. These split-second dynamics occur unconsciously in the mind of White Americans so frequently that White supremacy has become a fixed false belief no longer felt, thought, seen or conceptualized as delusional (Fanon, 1952; Poussaint, 1999).

This made-in-America concept of White and Whiteness was later imported by other nations. Richly diverse ethnic Europeans were whitewashed, combined, and then hierarchically categorized into a superior and entitled group. The concept of White was now associated with an identity of being good, right, free, and entitled (Horne, 2014). Simultaneously, people from the African diaspora were regarded as black, inferior, unentitled, and unworthy. In doing so, identification with nationalities, cultures, and religious affiliations were virtually erased in order to make way for the binary dyadic economic caste system of White and Black. The homogenizing concept of White coupled with the practices of enslavement supported and provided the vulnerable early colonizer’s ego in the “New Nation” with a new *superior* identity (Harris, 2012) they had no opportunity to attain in their

⁴According to Klein, gratification is a reaction to the mother who gratifies the infant by providing love, care, and food. I include food, love, care, and libidinal soothing as ways Blacks gratified Whites.

homelands. These tactics and entitlements in the colonies gave White people advantages which continue to enrich some Whites today and, are believed to be meritocratically earned successes based on personal superior intellect. This dynamic can unfairly pressure White males to attempt to live up to this perceived legacy of dominance and superiority in all areas and can lead to feelings of inferiority if they do not. I attempt to address this dynamic of unfair pressure on the White male to be superior in a vignette of group process presented later in the paper.

Clinical Material of Phantasy, Envy, and Envious Attack in the Black and White Dyad

“There is a higher law than the law of government. That’s the law of conscience.”

~ *Stokely Carmichael (a.k.a. Kwame Touré)*

Only through Klein’s theories, specifically the need of an object to protect and insure survival in vulnerable spaces and the concepts of envy and envious attack, have I been able to epistemologically explain the complex dynamics between Black and White people. Klein’s concept of phantasy is particularly useful in conceptualizing the psychological and physical morphing of Black people into mere Black bodies in the minds of some Whites. This variable of dehumanization is vital to the shocking ability of some non-psychopathic Whites to view passively appearing Blacks as murderously dangerous. These same White people, without apparent guilt, consciousness, or consequence, will insult, steal from, terrorize, and even kill Black people of all ages or, silently witness the aforementioned.

With all these built-in delusions and organizing stereotypes of Black and White people in the US, I am fascinated when White colleagues refer White patients to me, and when White patients seek treatment with me. I wonder what about their psyches and histories enable them to not take-up or to overcome societal views that I am not an inferior clinician because I am Black. Mrs. A is one of such patients who interestingly entrusts only Black clinicians with her medical care. In the vignette below, we made good use of the phantasies embodied in racism to work in the spaces between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions. Mrs. A is a 30-year-old White female born and raised in the US South. She grew up the eldest of three daughters in a family-centered culture, which did not overtly racialize others. Her kind and thoughtful mother suffered with untreated severe depression. Mrs. A was her mother’s primary and most trusted emotional caregiver. Mrs. A’s father was consumed with his research endeavors and consequently rather absent as his wife’s companion and emotional supporter.

Mrs. A presented 6 years ago with complaints of intrusive thoughts of killing herself. In conflict and denial, she was highly averse to the idea of being aggressive. In her mind, anger begot aggression, which seemed synonymous with destruction; she could not tolerate embodying the feeling that led to such behavior, so she often split off her anger. I discovered this early in our work together when I suggested she was angry. Her response to my observation was fury with me for my inability to understand her or anything else in those moments. I took her capacity to experience in-the-moment intense affect toward me and tolerance of frustration as good prognostic signs for her treatment.

During the 5th year of treatment, she admitted to feeling guilty after sometimes secretly laughing at my perceived lack of intellect, which for her explained my inept understanding of her. Although she was possibly smarter than I, her thinking and behavior reflected her efforts to defend against her envy of me knowing and understanding aspects of both her and her mother that she had yet to intuit. Her guilt for destroying some of my goodness with her defensive sense of intellectual superiority compelled her admission of laughing at me. After interpreting that she focused on her superiority to create distance between us, which ultimately protected her from what I imagined was dangerous and shameful dependency on and closeness with me, we noticed she seemed increasingly able to be vulnerable and authentically connected with me and to others outside the analytic space. I felt, at this juncture in our work, I could offer my thought that she experienced anger, not just with me, but with her mother as well, for forcing her to sacrifice her own need to be mothered, and, instead, take on

the role of her mother's dedicated emotional caregiver. In the session below, as with many others, she processed some of her anger and what she felt to be unspeakable racist thoughts, which I perceived differently on this occasion.

Mrs. A shared, "I had something really scary happen to me this weekend. I don't even wanna' talk about it but I've been waiting to come here because I know you won't judge me. I was in the park riding my bike and these Black guys came up to me. I knew I shouldn't be scared but I was. Then one of them rushed toward me and said, 'Look at me like that again and I'll kill you.'"

Not expecting such a violent threat, I not so analytically verbally reacted saying, "What!?" Relieved she did not seem to notice me, she expressed, "I was so angry." Pleased she was able to feel appropriate anger about being threatened I added, "And scared." Mrs. A, uninterested in my interruptions, stated, "I was going to report this to the police and then decided if I did, I wouldn't know if he would get killed. Do you think I did the right thing?"

For a split second I registered my feelings and thought, she was not wrong about the dynamic between Black males and law enforcement. But I sensed something else brewing, I just did not know what. I asked, "What do you think?" Mrs. A answered, "I know how the police are with Black people. I feel so bad and I'm angry."

Having my analytic footing back, I offered, "You feel so bad; your guilt is coming up again. You feel you need to protect the other in sacrifice of yourself. You're feeling guilt for appropriate anger. Does that remind you of anything?" Before my mind could register, I was under attack as she snarled, "No. What are you talking about? I know. It's going to be about my mother. She has nothing to do with this!" I had stepped into familiar territory between us littered with emotional landmines, a space filled with hate, defensiveness and very little thinking. In this space I was no longer a human being with thoughts to consider; my thoughts were not thoughts but assaults which were responded to with primitive energy and threatening words. Determined to hold firm I braced myself for the moments and sessions to come in which I would be bad and hated. I was withholding the wanted gratification of affirming she was a good White person (and daughter) because she was attempting to protect the (m)other. Instead, I unexpectedly focused on her displaced bad feelings I labeled as inappropriate guilt for wanting to call the police on an other who threatened her life. Her displacement of inappropriate guilt gave fuel and maintained her unconscious guilt and fear she was omnipotently destructive. This unconscious guilt she needed to displace was actually toward her intolerable feelings of fear of being or wanting to be destructive toward her mother.

Being accustomed to such attacks for presenting reality both in and outside the consultation room, I empathically stated, "You're angry with me for acknowledging this is the same kind of guilt you felt when you thought you would destroy your mother if you didn't sacrifice yourself." At this point, merciful silence fell between us just before her body immediately betrayed her attempts to be internally detached and interpersonally invulnerable by her face flushing as she began to cry. In this quick moment I could feel us re-joining, which painfully reminded her of the disconnection from her mother which she reflexively defended against by oscillating into the separate position of the paranoid-schizoid stating angrily and fearfully, "I hate this, I fucking hate you!" In this session I realized yet another reason she waited months to get a spot in the practice of a Black female analytic trainee despite other (White) seasoned analysts I offered her.

In me, before we ever met, Mrs. A had found a part-object she could utilize when she was scared or infuriated. I was an idealized "strong Black woman" whom she could depend on safely and learn from because I was not White and fragile. I was also an "angry Black woman" into whom she could guiltlessly shove her aggressive parts, hate, attack, control with her superior intellect, and annihilate if she felt compelled. Although the aggression between us saddened me, I protected my feelings with the understanding this was a manifestation of a transferential-countertransference racialized phantasy. With all of my Blackness I offered, "You can be angry with me and not destroy me, you, us." We then sat in extended and needed silence as we both absorbed her fears and phantasy before she whispered, "Only Black doctors have ever been able to help me." I stated gently yet plainly, "You think we're the only ones who can. The only ones who can survive your murderous anger." In that moment I had said

what was really brewing and unspeakable for her—the secret she did not know she was keeping: she wanted the liberty to destroy and enjoy attacking my Black body (in lieu of her mother). She looked over at me with a wickedly mixed expression of shock, pleasure, mistrust, and connection at being fully seen, taken in, understood, and accepted as being good and bad. I sat allowing the complexity of our emotions fill the room, my mind, and body, giving myself permission to be angry with and dislike her in the moment. In that psychoanalytic space I freely thought of the manic excitement and sadistic pleasure I have observed on the photographed faces of White people at lynchings (Harris, 2019; Ifill, 2007). This thought connected me to a disturbing comment made by a Black patient who labeled the media images of Black people being killed as “White porn,” something lewd and secretly enjoyed by some.

As Mrs. A and I worked together, she has had the courage to allow me to discover some of her darkest and most vulnerable parts. This included sharing that her mother coped with post-partum depression creating an environment of deprivation for Mrs. A in the fragility of infancy. This deprived environment resulted in enormous guilt around urges to enviously attack her mother and the persecutory anxieties related to such attacks (Klein, 1957). Specifically, her envy was born of her fury that her mother did not gratify her with her goodness. Additionally, I understood her suicidal ideation with no intent to kill as the split off fury toward the mother turned inward to protect her fragile mother.

In our 6th year of working together I was beginning to understand Mrs. A’s unconscious reasons she sought a Black psychoanalyst with whom she would not become paralyzed by the omnipotence of her guilt and corresponding lethal anger. Although the love-hate, value-devalue dynamic is relatively common in analytic space, I observed and tracked her racially nuanced transference as it emerged. For example, I observed her ability, when threatened by me and other Black people, to appropriately assert her right to be angry; however, with White people, she protected them by turning her anger inward, due to her fears of destroying them. The process of reflecting back to her the disparate experiences she recounted with objects in her life based on racial differences—safety with Blacks and danger with Whites and her corresponding comfort and discomfort with her expressions of anger, respectively with these groups, almost ruptured our trust in each other’s ability to accomplish what Bion (1962b) described as the capacity to feel and think simultaneously.

Klein (1957) explained that over time, as we both brave these moments of her repeatedly splitting off parts of herself, projecting, then hating and attacking me, and me containing and then giving them back in a modified form that is manageable, she will regain these parts in a more integrated way and more fully experience, be aware of, and understand her anger, guilt, and depression (Joseph, 1983). Specifically, she achieved more frequent outward expressions of anger with White friends and colleagues and has been able to express some of her needs with her mother while envious attacks on me have decreased. I have become a less stereotyped, idealized presence and a more whole and real person. Although Mrs. A may still regress when she is threatened by her deepest most intense feelings and in the company of a Black person, for the most part our Black and White dyad tends to function in a depressive position manner filled with the fulfillments and disappointments of a love relationship.

Mrs. A’s ideas of Black and White people are symbolic of an American experience of formed representations of Black people as repositories for rage, as well as containing⁵ figures, developed from early experiences, society and media images. Black people are frequently witnessed being utilized as less than human-part-objects repositories for rage, treated inferiorly and not retaliating (for the real fear of being subordinated in some way or killed). Mrs. A is one of many White people who unconsciously admires these acts of holding the other’s destructive parts to survive and consciously admires those who possess sturdy-enough egos to withstand and address various difficult topics such as racism. Because of the culture of her family and growing-up in an area with a large population of

⁵Bion, 1962b) explains that the function of containment is to help the baby deal with emotions that are so frustrating the baby is unable to think. The mother or analyst can perform the function of taking in the baby’s projections and giving them back in a more tolerable form.

Black doctors like the area in which I practice, she associated containment and good care with the Black clinicians to whom she was deeply appreciative. In one of her sessions, she shared her conscious understanding for her preference for Black doctors; her fantasy was that societal circumstances required Black clinicians to be smarter, work harder, and possess more skills to gain access, navigate, and graduate from White educational institutions.

Clinical Group Material of Historically Racialized Dynamics as Seen Through A LENS Free of Colonial Delusions

Recently, I was a participant in a one-day Tavistock style Diversity conference. The large conference group was split into smaller groups to process. At the beginning of our small group, the White female group leader, who sat across from me, said, “You want something from me.” I was mildly curious about her training as a group leader, but more than anything I was tired and not feeling up for this process group to which I had unknowingly registered. At the same time, feeling amused I thought, here we go again, White people want the Black person to carry the weight of the race discussion and already projecting that she has something I want. I trust my mind and bodily sensations and *felt*, she wanted something from me and in that vein, asked, “How did you assess that?” To which she replied, “You are looking in my eyes,” to which I responded, “You too are looking in mine. I think you want something from me.”

A tense silence fell in the group. I had comfortably and calmly challenged White leadership, which appeared shocking to all in the room. Determined not to carry the load and wishing our White female leader would interpret that maybe we both wanted something from each other, I let the silence stand between us. After a minute or so our mutually defensive silence was broken by a Black woman, Dr. Clear, a female colleague and friend who had also been randomly assigned to this group. She shared her observation that the group had split itself with Black people choosing to sit on one side and Whites choosing to sit on the other. The one Asian woman was ignored or perhaps absorbed in Whiteness—I am unsure, and this was not explored by members including the Asian woman who remained silent and was not addressed. When the large group reconvened, Mr. Lead, a White man and self-designated small group participant-leader, reported what our small group had discussed, including Dr. Clear’s comment. However, Mr. Lead erroneously ascribed Dr. Clear’s comment to Mr. Wilson, the one other White male in our group. Mr. Wilson did not correct this observation, nor did I. I reminded myself in that moment of my intent to coast, rationalizing that I was exhausted from analytic training and refused to freely give any of my Black energy and what a fellow colleague labeled “Black goodness.” I told myself of how utterly tiring and futile it is in these discussions to be asked for or offer thoughts only to have them actively or passively attacked with militating defensive-ness to destroy the truth and reality.

Once back in the small group, Mr. Lead commented in a genuinely concerned way that Dr. Clear seemed quiet and he wondered why. Dr. Clear responded that she did not know why she had quieted. As she spoke, I realized by her affect, she was not choosing to be silent. She was responding to her having been stolen from and the injury was so great she had dissociated from herself and the group. A bit later in the group, another White group member ascribed Dr. Clear’s observation to a different White person in our group. This suggested they did not completely buy that Mr. Wilson had made the comment. Now pained by my friend’s trauma and dismayed by the collective amnesia and silence about the aggressive theft from her, I felt compelled to share, “maybe Dr. Clear has become silent because her mind has been stolen and given away twice by, and to, White members of the group.” Mr. Lead quickly became aware, acknowledged, and offered sincere apology to Dr. Clear. The White woman, who had seconded his mis-attribution, was not apologetic. Rather, she began to cry and shared that her tears were caused by her feeling threatened by me and my anger. I took a minute to earnestly consider what she expressed—I learned to do this in my personal analysis. However, in that moment I shared that I felt too exhausted for the energy my anger required and I was also tired of this dynamic of theft from women and Black people constantly occurring. I also expressed relief that the dynamic was being acknowledged, which was a rare experience for me in White space.

Of course, this was a group of curious people volunteering to think about and work through diversity issues. Even with that, for the history of this country, some White people unconsciously maintain their psychic equilibrium through beliefs they are of superior intellect and should serve as the leader in dyads and groups; this is a belief I think White males are unfairly pressured to fulfill. I think this pressure is known by and empathized with by White males who might defensively respond by sticking together in their pacts to gain sturdiness from group affiliation. I see this dynamic being challenged when a White member peels off from the group to accept reality and is attacked by the White pact (for survival). This might be what Freud (1920) wrote about when describing the “instinct to restore an earlier state” when the self is pressured by outside “disturbing forces” (p. 35). I think Mr. Lead felt he should lead and was envious of Dr. Clear’s mind, hence took it to cope with his fleeting feelings of vulnerability and inferiority with not knowing, recognizing, and understanding diversity dynamics right in front of his eyes. I believe he earnestly wanted to engage in and lead diversity equity and inclusion work and might have been a leader amidst his White colleagues. However, when with a group of Black colleagues operating at his or beyond his knowledge base, his unprocessed material was getting in his way of seeing what was really transpiring in the dynamics. When Mr. Wilson was asked about Mr. Lead falsely attributing Dr. Clear’s comment to him, he shared he was aware he did not make the comment and was unaware why he did not make the correction. In his silence, I wondered if he just sat and enjoyed the habitual gifts of his White male supremacy. Dr. Clear, who uses her mind to make her living, was treated as if she did not *own* her thoughts. In phantasy, the White members owned them. This caused this usually thoughtful and esteemed clinician to fragment and split; she became what her Black body was pressured to be, a Black body vacuous of thought. This is projective identification in action. I also think the White female member attempted to utilize me through projection to *serve* containing functioning as a mother or therapist would for her split off uncomfortable emotions, which I refused. The Black (female) body is often unconsciously and consciously expected to take care of the White ego and body by bolstering, explaining, and soothing; I have often been guilty of acting-out this role in this scripted American scene. My observation of the group’s dynamics, along with my protest of being utilized, I believe, discomfited her, more precisely, tapped into anger and resentment of the reality presented and not being able to take from my mind what she did not possess. I also imagine she was embarrassed and possibly hurt to discover that she participated in stealing from a woman. Her projection classically transformed me in phantasy to a persecuting bad-object she was scared would attack her and therefore she had the right to defend and attack. Perpetual use of projection results in distorted perceptions, delusions which feed paranoia and feelings of endangerment (Feldman, 1997; Segal, 1979), which is all too often the case between Black and White people.

Inability to Experience and Demonstrate Gratitude Toward the Black Other: Further Reflections on Envy and Envious Attack

“I am not Your Negro” ~James Baldwin

Segal (1979) writes, “In envy the direct aim is to spoil the attributes of the object. This spoiling also has a defensive aspect, since, if the enviable characteristics are destroyed, one no longer has the painful experience of the feeling of envy” (p. 141). According to Klein, envy is one of our most primitive emotions. Envious attack, which defends against envy, is the driving force of destruction and harm toward the other and occurs on a continuum. Various forms of envious attack such as denigration, projection, stifled love, and feelings of hate are used to manage envy experienced toward different objects (Spillius, 1993). The form and force of the envious attack depends on the self’s constitution, environments, object related histories, perception of the other, and degree of real or perceived threat. Fortunately, gratitude has the effect of reducing envy (Klein, 1957). Unfortunately, when envy is excessive, the ability to feel love and gratitude is impeded (Spillius, 1993).

Let me speak of envious attack in a way we might all agree. Psychoanalysts, who are primarily White, are conscious and accept their value therefore, at times, can readily identify and experience being transferentially envied and enviously attacked. I, as a Black person (whose blackness is intact) can readily identify the goodness of self and other Black people and frequently experience and observe envy and envious attacks of Black people. I want to note, even some Black people are not able to see Black goodness for the centuries of assaults on their psyches. I have witnessed this in my own psychoanalytic home when at one of our institute's talks on diversity, I offered the suggestion that Black others and "others" are hated and envied for the *goodness* they possess, and I was met with what seemed like stunned silence. White people do not expect to experience envy towards Blacks; this is an element of racist superior thinking that blindly assumes everyone desires to be White (Bodnar, 2004). This manner of thinking details two defensive processes to combat unconscious envy: one, projecting the envy out, thereby, seeing the self as non-envious and the other as envious (of wanting to be White) and two, denigrating the (Black) other's goodness to diminish the (White) self's envy (Klein, 1946; Spillius, 1993). One of the problematic psychological outcomes of enslavement (besides its fundamental brutality) was the ability for Whites to legally own Black people, thus utilizing all the attributes of Blacks to gratify their needs without usual and customary experience, expectation, and expression of appropriate thanks. Black goodness was thought to be possessed by Whites, hence, Blacks possessed no goodness. Gratitude toward Blacks, including acknowledgment of their goodness, value, and contributions, could mitigate feelings of envy. For example, at the diversity conference in the vignette, if the group leader could have valued or tolerated my supposition and expressed that she wanted something from me instead of becoming mute, we might have been able to process this and come to some enlightenment for all. Nonetheless, the Black other has been experienced by the White self as the mother is experienced by the infant: entitled to what the m/other provides without notice or appreciation given. Recently, during a pandemic zoom therapy session I was reminded of this entitlement when a patient's 1-yr-old climbed and flipped over her shoulder to grab her breast out to feed. My patient, with a sad and slightly embarrassed expression jokingly remarked, "he is so disrespectful." We chuckled at her good use of humor to cope with her son's complete aggressive entitlement to take what he wanted when he wanted and her ambivalence about this aspect of their relationship. Moments later her son finished and walked away after his feed as if nothing had happened between them—he did not appear thankful. He was gratified by the breast as he lay belly-up with hands and legs flayed in a contented adorable slumber.

The degree of gratification the self receives from the other signals the degree of richness of the (m) other (Hinshelwood, 1994). Whites who owned and heavily utilized Black people's attributes, knew of the inner riches of Black people. The defensive structure developed in colonial America continues to disable White people's ability and willingness to recognize and acknowledge such goodness and the persistent theft of and perceived ownership of the qualities of Black people. Diangelo (2018) explains, when the *reality* of racism is addressed, many Whites resort to "silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude, and other forms of pushback" in an attempt to reinstate the racial hierarchy (p. 8). Such powerful defenses make it nearly impossible to perceive of Black goodness, the theft of Black's goodness, and envy of Black goodness one is unable to take or own. The feeling of envy can result in envious attacks of Black people. What adds to the impact and repetition of these destructive dynamics is an inability by the attacker to recognize they are harming a human being; hence, the attacker is void of gratitude for what they have taken from the Black person as well as, void of any feelings of reparative guilt.

Current Psychoanalysis in Practice: Next Steps

"Wake Up!" ~Spike Lee

As psychoanalysts, we come to this theoretical orientation knowing that achieving psychoanalytic mindedness requires, yet, more work. An important part of this work is our own personal analyses, which promotes our ability to question curiously and become more self-observing, whole, and sturdy

for ourselves and our patients. My hope is that my colleagues become aware of and experience conflict when they feel, hear, or witness paranoid-schizoid behaviors between Blacks and Whites. This includes the ability to be aware of envious attacks of Black people (and quite frankly any “other”) and demonstrate the courage many of our patients have that is required to face ignorance, unlearn, and reconstruct new more authentic understandings of self and other. This type of understanding of the relatedness and need between self and other would support more stability in the depressive position. Attaining this knowledge is generally terribly uncomfortable for both the patient and facilitator, but it is the gift we as psychoanalysts can impart to ourselves, our patients, and broader communities that have remained split as it pertains to the thoughts and behaviors related to racism in the US. Psychoanalysis has the theoretical tenets, if applied correctly, to make a significant impact on the individual and collective psyches in the US if we take on and *use* the study of these racialized power dynamics of Whiteness and its impact on the subjugate and the dominant members.

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