

MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING

Perspectives from Counselors as Clients of Color



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CHAPTER

ARETHA FAYE MARBLEY

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The Black or African American Client's Story *The Souls of Black Folk*

I noticed that with you. When you first called, you were very academic, very intelligent. You started out with all the buzz words of our chosen profession. But when we began to really talk, you reverted back into the local colloquialism. [He laughs.]

—Joshua

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on African Americans' experiences in mental health followed by a discussion of African American study participants' experiences as they relate to the emergent themes. Using these participants' experiences as a center point, the chapter will highlight the intra-group differences existing among Black Americans, provide discussion on counseling relationships that African Americans view as successful based on the personal and professional experiences of the African American participants, and discuss how the factors addressed in the first two chapters (bias, culture, and credibility) directly relate to African Americans. The chapter concludes with implications and recommendations for counseling and psychotherapy with African Americans.

Embedded in the stories in this chapter on African Americans, like DuBois's (1903/1996) book *The Souls of Black Folk*, is a compelling storyline of African American life that includes the struggles and the triumphs, and the human abuse clashing with their spiritual strength. Like African Americans themselves, some of their stories are complex, tragic, and profoundly paradoxical, but they are accurate stories of the lives of Black people in the United States. The stories in this chapter, like those in *The Souls of Black Folks*, are prophetic, inspirational, and timeless. Shawn's and Joshua's stories capture the issues relevant to African American people just as poignantly today as Dubois's book captured them more than 100 years ago. Or have the issues of the 19th and 20th centuries merely remained unchanged?

AFRICA: THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF ALL HUMANS

I believe that civilization did start in Africa. I believe that is where the beginning is, in Africa, because of the whole slavery thing, not just the ones brought over to America, [but] even the Egyptian slaves. I associated them with people who are my skin color, knowing that just because you are my skin color that doesn't make you African American per se, but still all of that is a piece. And the American piece is because of the United States. That is how I associated those two together.

—Shawn

Every human being alive today, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality, originated from the womb of the Black Eve of sub-Saharan Africa. In stronger words, human evolution began on the continent of Africa in the *hood*. Although most scholars (Fagundes et al., 2007; Grine et al., 2007) have by now agreed on this, the African origin of anatomically modern humans remains one of the most curious stories of all and the focus of much heated debate.

In fact, paleoresearchers (Barham, 2001; Bickerton, 2003; Chase & Dibble, 1990; Manica, Amos, Balloux, & Hanihara, 2007; McBrearty & Brooks, 2000; McDougall, Brown, & Fleagle, 2005; Watts, 2002; White et al., 2003; Wurz, le Roux, Gardner, & Deacon, 2003) from multiple disciplines (zoology, anthropology, genetics, climatology, archaeology, and linguistics) have surprisingly concluded with consensus that, ancestrally, modern human beings are descendants of an African Adam and African Eve. According to Manica and others, as modern humans, we all trace the root of our genealogical tree to the same forefather and foremother, who probably lived in South-Eastern Africa.

Furthermore, some anthropologists (Grine et al., 2007) believe that the contemporary human race could share common ancestry with a being in Africa who lived about 120,000 to 220,000 years ago. Geneticists (e.g., Wells, 2002), through the analysis of DNA from people in all regions of the world, concluded that all humans alive today descended from a single man who lived in Africa around 60,000 years ago. In addition, today there is general agreement that *Homo erectus*, the precursor to modern humans, evolved in Africa and gradually expanded to Eurasia beginning about 1.7 million years ago. Last, Manica and associates (2007) combined their genetic data with new measurements of a large sample of skulls to show definitively that today's humans originated from a single area in sub-Saharan Africa.

This story of Africa as the ancestral home of all humans is a precursor to the story of the African Diaspora. It is one that traces the African Diaspora beyond the slavery era, back to those who inhabited Africa millennia ago. Most importantly, knowing that all modern humans are kinfolk is the ideal segue into any discussion on racially and ethnically different groups and a great introduction to the African Diaspora.

THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA

I remember going to the Majestic Hotel, and I don't mind saying that on camera, in Hot Springs, Arkansas. They had just built a new part of it, and the place where we stayed looked like the old part of it. And I remembered going down to the swimming pool with my friend, my best friend, and the pool was full of White people.

I remember sticking my big toe in to test the water, and all those people jumped out the pool except for an old, White couple from Germany. I never will forget that. Everybody else jumped out. This was in 1970. It was a great cultural shock for me then.

—Joshua

The African Diaspora

Although Black America is not a monolith, the tracing of modern humans may be a bit problematic and even more controversial than tracing the African Diaspora. The story of how Africans were captured in slavery to be scattered all over the world, were stripped of their way of life (language, traditions, families, and dignity), and yet managed to rise is a documented, undisputable fact, though perhaps no less heated, or controversial, or debated in the research. As historical milestones in the sojourn of Africans in America, both slavery and emancipation are precursors to and set the tone and stage for African Americans' experiences and perceptions of mental health services.

To some Black Americans, as to some European Americans, discrimination, like slavery and lynching, is not real. Thus, the African Diaspora offers a few possible and plausible explanations for the different opinions, experiences, perceptions, and feelings voiced about the Black experience in the United States and those issues germane to the Black community.

For nearly 4 centuries, an estimated 10 to 20 million African slaves were transported to North America and the Caribbean Islands in the Atlantic slave trade (Johnson, 1990). As a result of this African Diaspora, the racial and ethnic identities of people of African descent, especially African Americans, include Hispanic and Latino, Native American, and European ancestry. Katz (1986) asserted that more than 90% of African Americans have American Indian ancestry.

As a consequence of the sexual exploitation of African women during slavery, most African Americans have European ancestry (Mannix & Cowley, 1962). Others of African descent share with African Americans eternal ties to the motherland, but their religions and ethnic and national identities vary greatly. They are Christians, Muslims, Jews, Catholics, and Buddhists. They are citizens (or descended from citizens) of countries such as Jamaica, Haiti, Brazil, the Virgin Islands, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central America, Canada, and those throughout Europe, Asia, and Australia, and they include native-born Africans, Afro-Europeans, and Afro-French (Cross, 1991). For some, these ethnic national identities (e.g., Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Hispanic) are as far as they wish to go back.

The storytelling of the African Diaspora centers on the amazing resiliency of African people and their culture despite their scattering throughout the world and the horrific experience of forced migration and slavery, followed by the decades of marginalization that preceded and followed the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Thus, any in-depth understanding of African Americans is based on an understanding of African American history and culture beginning with slavery and the years of being exposed to the most persistent and violent forms of individual, institutional, and societal discrimination.

Even more amazing, whether resulting from the constant reestablishment of African traditions during the continuous transporting of slaves during the Middle Passage (the journey from Africa to the Americas by slave ship) or resulting from culture that was simply passed down through the generations, elements of African culture can be found wherever people of African descent reside in the world—whether as a result of slavery or the Diaspora, aspects of culture such as language, music, food, folklore, and the art of storytelling have endured.

Resulting from this legacy of hundreds of years of American slavery, African Americans have trod through a wilderness of lynching, Jim Crow laws, racism, poverty, disenfranchisement, racial profiling, and discrimination of all kinds. Yet, despite the numerous obstacles and attacks that society has mounted against them since slavery, African Americans have been resilient and creative in finding ways to survive, retain some of their African values and structure, and use acculturation, assimilation (when needed), and wholesomeness that contribute to American society. This creativity, resiliency, knack for survival, and wholesomeness are evident in the African American case study presented in this chapter, and should be highlighted in the literature on African Americans.

For African Americans, relics of African customs have remained and are quite evident in contemporary African American culture, such as their resilient belief that “it takes a village” to raise a child. In fact, the term *African American* is an ethnic term symbolizing a culture that is shared between people who live in the United States and those who reside in Africa. Ideally, the term *African American* is a move to centralize and solidify persons of African descent and their U.S.-born ancestors toward cultural, sociopolitical, and economic ties to and centeredness with Africa (Harper, 1994).

People of African Descent

I'm surrounded by my family, the place where I attend worship services, any kind of social gathering, and the people are usually people who look and sound like me.

—Shawn

Throughout much of U.S. history, African Americans have been by far the largest of the groups of color in the United States. In more recent years, due to declining Black birth rates and increases in immigration, other groups of color (e.g., Hispanics and Latinos) have risen in size comparable to the African American population. According to projections by the U.S. Census Bureau (2008b), in 2010 African Americans numbered 41.1 million, or roughly 13.5% of the nation.

A profile of African Americans reveals that they are living longer than before, but not as long as European Americans; nor are they as healthy. The number of African American families is increasing, but with more being maintained by women who are at or below the poverty level. Although there are better high school completion rates than ever before, there are still vast racial achievement gaps in levels of educational performance, educational attainment, college enrollment, and college graduation rates between Blacks and Whites. This brief statistical profile of African Americans

is not meant to represent them from a deficit angle, but rather to highlight that tremendous racial disparities still exist for African American people and provide a partial explanation of the social ills that exist in the African American community.

First, let me pause and define the use of the terms *Black*, *Black American*, and *African American* in this book and discuss how those terms may explain some of the differences that exist within the Black community. *Black* is a color category ostensibly referring to skin color, even though Blacks range in color from passing as White to dark or “deep chocolate”—the latter similar in color and traditions to coastal East Africans. This means that color is not about the individuals’ skin color but, rather, the relationship among the lighter and darker races, as opposed to dark- or light-skinned people.

Historically, in the United States, racial labeling decreed that people having any amount of Black ancestry could never identify as White. This strict government identification can be traced back to slavery and to the “one-drop (of Black blood, or ancestry) rule” that prevented any person of African ancestry (however small or invisible that ancestry was) from being considered White. During this era a Black person could, however, have some other non-White racial identity such as American Indian and Hispanic.

The term *Black Americans* is used for any Blacks who are American, whether by birth or naturalization and regardless of their ancestry, nationality, language, culture, or traditions.

The term *African American*, in contrast, refers to those Black Americans who are the descendants of slaves. They came to colonial America and, later, the United States in shackles by way of the Middle Passage, as opposed to those Blacks and other groups of color whose relatives and ancestors were immigrants who voluntarily came to the United States on airplanes or boats (legally or illegally), that is, of their own volition.

Thus, this diversity of Black Americans, particularly the different experiences found in their ancestral lineages, illustrates the variety found within the Black experience and provides one reason for Black Americans’ diverse and sometimes contradictory perceptions and experiences of being Black. This, in and of itself, results in broad implications for the emergence of mental health in the Black community and for developing mental health strategies to effectively address Black and African American mental health needs.

Next, and logically, just as there are White folk in the United States whose ancestors were not slaveholders, there are Blacks and Black Americans whose ancestors were not slaves. In other words, there are Black Americans whose ancestors came from other countries and continents and whose heritage is not buried in the viciousness of slavery. As a result, they will not have worn the heavy burden of generations filled with discrimination and violence that followed U.S. slavery. Likewise, there are Black Americans (native or immigrant) whose ancestors were not slaves, and who have not overtly experienced racism, discrimination, or prejudice; yet they are, like African Americans, the recipients of the American institutions of oppression, inequality, social injustice, and hate crimes—more byproducts of U.S. slavery.

Similarly, there are European Americans whose ancestors did not own slaves; who were not racist, prejudiced, or actively discriminatory against people of color;

and yet who struggle with believing they are privileged. Nevertheless, White people in the United States, regardless of their ancestry and lack of prejudice and racism, do benefit from and enjoy the social, political, cultural, and financial advantages of being White—another direct derivative of U.S. slavery.

AN AFROCENTRIC WORLDVIEW IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

God allows me to be a better family member, which allows me to be a better neighbor, which allows me to be a better person.

—Joshua

African American values and cultural orientation are based on the collective thought and unity of their people. *Harambee* is a Swahili word that signifies the village concept of coming together relationally. This commonly held value expresses facing life not alone but pulling together, and recognizing the power of one but also the power of many; that is, pulling together eases the burden one might face. *Consubstantiation*, a theological doctrine that everything in the universe is connected as a part of a whole, is another commonly held belief among people of African descent.

In the African American community, there is a constant interplay among systems and among subsystems (Billingsley, 1968). That means that the focus in the African American community is on cooperation and group cohesiveness. For African Americans, the cliché “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” and the biblical scripture “A house divided amongst itself will not stand” capture the essence of their Afrocentrism. Further, the interactions are circular rather than linear, and when one part is not functioning properly, the other parts are adversely affected.

Thus, from a cultural perspective, a healthy way—one that is consistent with the notions of the village, *Harambee*, and consubstantiation—of viewing the African American family should begin with the notion of *Afrocentrism*. Afrocentrism promotes the strength perspective of African people as centered, located, oriented, and grounded as opposed to weaker, pathological portrayals in earlier research. As a result, according to Asante (2003), Afrocentrism is meant to convey the profound need for African people to be relocated historically, economically, socially, politically, and philosophically.

According to Bell, Bouie, and Baldwin (1990), the fundamental principles underlying the African American worldview are “oneness with nature” and “survival of the group.” The principle of *oneness with nature* asserts that all elements in the universe (human, animals, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena) are interconnected; that is, humanity, nature, and the self are conceptualized as the same phenomenon.

The principle of *survival of the group* prioritizes the survival of the corporate whole (the community), which includes all Black people, rather than the individual or some segment of the community apart from the corporate whole. Cultural values consistent with the basic principles of the African American worldview are interdependence, cooperation, unity, mutual responsibility, and reconciliation.

With such a violent, traumatic, and abusive history, it should be no surprise that African American people to a great extent need mental health services. Yet, it has taken far too long for the mental health profession to realize the need for an Afrocentric approach that connects the blight and shackles of slavery to the mental health of African American people. For example, African American females' (girls and women) personal-historical context of sexual assault should be considered when exploring their physical and sexual abuse cognitions and experiences.

Consequently, an Afrocentric worldview is one that could augment any therapy with African American clients (Caldwell & White, 2001; Parham, 2002; Parham & Caldwell, 2006; Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000). In fact, African American scholars from multiple academic disciplines have argued the need for an Afrocentric worldview for not only the mental health profile of African Americans but also criminal justice, medical, educational, and political profiles. Ultimately, Asante (2003) believed that an Afrocentric worldview will not always correct the miseducation of African American students, but for all students from preschool to college, it is beneficial to all regardless of race, color, ethnicity, ancestry, and country of origin. All in all, the concepts of Afrocentrism, "it takes a village," and *Harambee* have been major forces in the survival of African Americans. Thus, from cultural systemic lenses, Afrocentrism (Asante, 2003) appears to be an appropriate framework for understanding traditional African American life and for viewing this African American case study.

"IN A MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS, THERE IS SAFETY"

Yes, counseling works. Counseling works for everyone. The Bible says, it's a scripture, "In a multitude of counselors, there is safety."

—Joshua

Well, for one I was a little ambivalent about going into counseling. So that was a little bit of the talking, but there's a piece of me that said, "You don't talk to people outside of your family about things that are just going on with you, not necessarily other family members. That's something that you just keep within the family."

—Shawn

African Americans' historical experiences as victims of sexual abuse, physical violence, and psychological trauma, with intergenerational trauma and the unending effects of a history of slavery, racism, and sexism, should be considered in the diagnosis and treatment of abuse and trauma. Yet African Americans, like their other brothers and sisters of color, underutilize, drop out of, and are not effectively helped by counseling services.

Research indicates that premature termination rates for African American clients are related in part to the clients' trust level. Although ascribed status as defined by Sue and Zane (1987) is important for achieving credibility, Poston, Craine, and Atkinson's (1991) study suggested that the ascribed status of being in the counselor role may not offset the mistrust that some African Americans have of Whites in general.

You don't necessarily know these things are right, but because you've been taught a certain way, you seem to believe in them without challenging certain beliefs. I am interested in challenging some of those beliefs because if I don't know anyone else, it is important for me to know myself and to check my attitudes and beliefs about different things.

—Shawn

The Psychological Distress of Racism and Sexism

I remember my first cultural shock was really in the 10th grade. I was president of the drama club. We went to Hot Springs, Arkansas, at the end of the year. And when we got over there, we had already booked and paid our fees and everything. And the people at the hotel saw that we were Black, and they went up on their fees, so that we didn't have enough money to pay for it. So I called back to the White principal and told him that they wouldn't allow us to stay, because they went up on the fees. He told me, "Don't you come back. I want you to stay, and I'll pay the rest of it. Whatever they charge, I'll pay for it."

—Joshua

I grew up in the South, and the discrimination still goes on and things like that. It is not so much in your face, but it is the subtle things. It's hard to change when you are accustomed to doing things a certain way and believing things a certain way, believing what your grandparents or whatever passed down.

—Shawn

The oppressive and abusive experiences in African American male and female lives suggest that racism and sexism may have unique and interactive links to psychological distress. Therefore, understanding the historical cultural values and experiences of people of African descent as a means of developing appropriate counseling interventions is another powerful tool that can and should be used when counseling African Americans.

As opposed to White women, African American women, with multiple identities accompanied by multiple constraints, have historically been victims of oppression, marginality, poverty, and discrimination (Vasquez & Magraw, 2005) relating to their minority statuses of being Black, female, and poor. As a result of those statuses, the African American woman is often a victim of the exponential effect of being all three. As a female, she, along with her White sisters and others sisters of color, has increased likelihood of being poor as compared to men, and there is much evidence that poverty and economic inequality are linked to depression in women.

The mental, physical, moral, scholarly, and intellectual attacks on African American men have been cruel, vicious, and mentally inhuman. Both society and the academic literature have mercilessly perpetuated negative stereotypic images and descriptions of African American men, painting a dismal picture of Black men in general. The African American man has been characterized as being the absent parent, angry, violent, irresponsible, animalistic, irresponsible, a stud, a criminal, and an endangered species. Again, any work in counseling African American men must begin with a context of a lifetime of abuse and discrimination and a model that empowers them rather than rendering them invisible.

CASE 1: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN STORY: JOSHUA AND SHAWN

This case study comprises the cultural stories of two African American counselors (one male and one female) who as clients have shunned, had successful and unsuccessful encounters with, and had negative and positive outcomes of counseling services. The large intragroup differences within the African American ethnic group make generalizing and theorizing based on the ethnic theme of these two individuals complex and, in fact, impossible. To illustrate the within-group differences, the African American client, the first case study presented, consists of the perspectives of two African Americans who are different in gender, upbringing, and age, but have had somewhat similar experiences with counseling services.

Yehoshua (Joshua)

We need that Paul figure ... we need that Barnabas figure ... we need the Timothy. And we need a Joshua.

—Joshua

Yehoshua is the Hebrew name for *Joshua*, Moses' successor. Joshua is a biblical figure in the Old Testament who was a brave, fierce, intelligent, and charismatic leader, and at the same time a loyal, obedient, and quiet servant. As such, Joshua was singled out by God to complete Moses' mission of successfully leading the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt (the land of bondage) into the Promised Land.

At the time of this study, Joshua, a 42-year-old African American male, was pastoring an African American, inner-city Church of God in Christ (COGIC) located in a large Southern city. Shawn, an African American female, is a 28-year-old from the same city, working as a graduate assistant in her counseling department. Each of these individuals is described in detail, and their level of acculturation, stage of racial identity, and multiple intragroup perspectives are discussed.

Pastor Joshua speaks and moves very gingerly and quietly, which sort of betrays his intimidating, well-over-six-feet, 200-plus-pound frame. He moves gently through his space, but with a sense of dignity, authority, and just a fleeting hint of power. His words and soft voice are laced with much ethnic, racial, and cultural pride, as well as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-identity.

Joshua chose his pen name from the biblical figure Joshua. As a pastor, he teaches his congregation that we need several people in our lives. We need a Paul figure, who is that counselor and mentor for us. We need that Barnabas figure, who was a friend of Paul, and can tell him his faults and pull his coattails. We need a Timothy, who Paul helped to bring up, and who needs nurturing and having values imparted to him. And, he later added with a laugh, we need a Joshua.

Joshua is married, and his past occupations include being a correctional officer, a police officer, and a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recruit. He has a bachelor of arts (BA) degree in criminal justice and a master of science (MS) in rehabilitation counseling, and is currently pursuing an doctorate of education

(EdD) in counseling and education. His current professional memberships are the American Counseling Association (ACA), Tennessee Counseling Association (TCA), and COGIC. As a client, he has participated in a range of counseling encounters, including group and individual counseling but primarily pastoral counseling.

Acculturation When I asked Joshua to describe his relationship to the African American community, he replied,

I love it. I'm glad I'm a part of it. I believe that I've been privileged and blessed to be a part of it. I am so much a part of it that I'm in the process of buying or building a house, or one of the two, and I refuse to buy or build in an area outside of where my people live.

Discussing the role that language plays in his culture, he continued,

It is very, very important. When I first began to pastor and teach, then I had to consciously revert back or refrain from using certain words that I took for granted that everyone used. When I left the professional setting and just began to pastor, my language changed. Sometimes it is hard to balance the two.

Multiple Perspectives Joshua's exposure to people who are racially, ethnically, and culturally different from him is vast. He has traveled and attended workshops throughout this country. Nevertheless, he reflects that going to high school was where he really became more exposed to people from other racial backgrounds and got his first dose of racism. Growing up in the South, Joshua was surrounded by racism, yet he was taught not to be racist. In fact, some of the greater positive impact during his childhood came from White people. He remembers his 11th-grade English teacher, who not only challenged him but also helped him explore himself.

It was during this conversational topic that Joshua reclined back into his chair, rested his chin on his hands, looked upward and to the right, paused for a moment, and recollected the harsh realities of the culture shock, racism, and abuse that came along with exposure to the White race at such a young, tender, and impressionable age. For instance, Joshua again recalled that painful high school incident where he and his classmates were stuck in another city because the hotel increased the housing fees when they saw they were Black.

In spite of the few moments of pain from dredging up those memories, Joshua's spiritedness returned and he continued his sharing. He had fond memories of his English teacher, a White woman, who through her constant encouragement validated him and his minority experience, empowered him as an African American man, and positively and profoundly impacted his entire life. He shared,

I was coming into myself; I was reading Black poetry, really finding out who I was as a person, as an African American. I was becoming very militant, and she encouraged that. I was on the newspaper staff, and she was the sponsor, and she encouraged us to explore ourselves and our identity. I remember one time we had old antiquated books, and in our literature book, it stated

that Europe was the cradle of civilization, and she turned to me and said, "Do not believe everything you read; everybody knows that Africa was the cradle of civilization."

Joshua, reflecting on his training and what he called his "brainwashing," concluded that the way he was educated in school and taught White history was like the education of almost all African American people. He felt strongly that "being an African American, we have been taught about the other cultures." This, coupled with his experiences as an African American male in a White racist society, qualified him to be above average in multicultural awareness and knowledge. In fact, when I asked Joshua to rate himself in multicultural or cross-cultural counseling on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being low, he replied with a wide smile, "Honey, when I think of my lifelong exposure and acclimation to the White folk, I give myself a 10." He later added with seriousness, "Like I told you, I was raised to be multicultural. I give myself a 10."

Joshua's document delineating the racial and ethnic breakdown of his counseling clientele by percentage showed 70% African American, 29% European American, and 1% other.

Racial Identity Joshua's score placed him in stage 5 of racial identity development. According to Helms (1984), in stage 5, internalization, the individual achieves a sense of inner peace or acceptance of self. This acceptance of self or inner peace allows the person to respect other races and worldviews.

Shawn

My July 3, 1997, journal entry reads,

This day has been one of the days that you sort of want to forget. Though I was able to complete two of my interviews, Murphy had been *acting*. Yes, Murphy's Law had interrupted the morning events, and the fact that Shawn (my second scheduled interviewee) and I played phone tag for a couple of hours didn't make it any better. Shawn approached me and introduced herself with a very soft "Hello" and shook my hand warmly. She was a medium tall, cocoa-brown, slender woman who moved softly with very slow, deliberate, controlled steps. I knew instinctually that it was Shawn (even though she looked nothing like I had imagined her to look). The softness and warmth of both her voice and handshake were a sort of betrayal of the womanish strength that was so evident in her approach, her appearance, and her presence.

This regal young woman approached me with an air of African dignity, which is like an African queen. She wore a pastel-green dress with a fitted bodice that flared at the hips. Long, thick, French braids that hung down below her neck bounced in and off her face as she came closer. I noticed, when she looked directly into my eyes, a pair of soft, rounded eyeglass frames. A refreshing combination of elegance, professionalism, realness, and African American culture was evident. So much so, that in spite of my fatigued and manic/depressive state, I found myself relaxing and looking forward to the interview.

Shawn, the youngest of the participants, is the only one who is single. She is engaged to a doctoral student in the counseling psychology program at her university. She has a BA in psychology and an MA in counseling, and is currently pursuing her PhD in counseling. She describes her theoretical orientation as follows: “I am a little Rogerian, depending on the client, of course. I am a little Adlerian, family constellation and things like that, like how people relate to each other. And a little systemic.” She is in the process of joining ACA.

Acculturation Shawn is a 28-year-old African American female who affirms a very strong kinship with the African American community. When asked what connects her to this community, she responded by saying simply, “My church, my family, and my neighborhood are African American.”

Racial Identity Shawn self-administered the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIAS) and obtained a high score in stage 5, the internalization stage.

Multiple Perspectives According to Shawn, she has always been around people who are racially different, mainly, she said, “Caucasians and a handful of Hispanics, at least, as far as the school setting and things like that.” In addition, while attending college in St. Louis, she lived in an apartment complex alongside a lot of Mexican Americans and Caucasians. In her document on the racial and ethnic breakdown of her counseling clientele by percentage, the racial breakdown was 20% Caucasian and 80% African American.

To ascertain Shawn’s perceptions of her multicultural awareness, knowledge, or skills, I asked Shawn to rate herself on a scale from 1 to 10 in the area of multicultural or cross-cultural counseling. She replied very conservatively, “I think there’s a lot out there that I don’t know. But, just for myself, I would like to be a little more educated. Okay, I would give myself a 5.”

AFRICAN AMERICAN CLIENTS: EMERGENT THEMES

Biases

Gender With both Joshua and Shawn, preference to seek counsel from females and female counselors is consistent with African American culture and traditions, in particular the nurturing, supportive role that African American mothers and grandmothers have played. Historical and contemporary gender roles in the African American community are discussed further in Chapter 8.

Socioeconomics The need for financial support has always been prevalent in the African American family, including middle-class families. African American families have historically lagged behind White families in annual income. According to McAdoo (1981), an income gap exists between Black and White families regardless of family composition, but the gap was narrowest for married-couple families with working wives (p. 137). The literature indicates that higher socioeconomic status is generally associated with larger support networks that comprise both family

and friends. Both Joshua and Shawn work in African American communities, and believe that socioeconomic (status or finance) can be an important variable in African American clients' decision of whether or not to opt for counseling.

The African American culture, [and] I suspect [this] is the same truth of other cultures, is kind of layered by the socioeconomic status of the people. People of a higher economic status are more willing to receive counseling. In the lower socioeconomic status, it's usually being forced upon them.

In addition to her African American clients, Shawn, as an African American student with little money, has firsthand knowledge that socioeconomic can be a major barrier to going to counseling:

I was very satisfied in hindsight; I am glad that I used the free service. Regarding my clients, many have expressed that if the insurance won't pay, their child wouldn't be able to attend. Most are poor and receiving some type of assistance.

Ethnic, Racial, and Cultural For Joshua and Shawn, like most African Americans, being bombarded with real-life experiences of racial biases is an everyday occurrence. With these experiences of racism, prejudice, and discrimination comes a paranoia or inability to trust Whites.

Joshua commented, "Professionally, and in the ministry, I have had to break down racial lines."

Shawn commented, "The counselor that I had was Caucasian, and I was thinking, 'Is she going to understand me?'"

In Summary

According to Sandhu and Brown (1996), bias in the form of prejudice is so pervasive and persistent in pluralistic societies that it affects a wide range of variables such as surnames, gender, ethnicity, and race. This section has uncovered the many perceptions of bias and their influences on participants' successful or unsuccessful experiences, and on their decisions about whether to participate, continue, or discontinue in counseling. These are responses to one of the underlying questions targeting the African American participants' perceptions of what factors are involved in the counseling experiences they considered successful, including active utilization, completeness of counseling, and achieving positive outcomes.

For the African American participants, biases ranged from gender preference, to the restrictive nature of living in poverty and being economically marginalized, to the day-to-day and real-life experiences of racial biases, racism, prejudice, and discrimination. African American counselors' exposure to negative environmental and social stressors, like other counselors of color, may have diminished credibility, that is, the value of the therapeutic relationship. That reality for so many African American clients has created paranoia toward and mistrust of White people that often trickles down into therapeutic relationships. Many times in a cross-cultural

counseling situation, clients must first struggle through the issue of trust before any “real” counseling can begin. That means, as Yu and Gregg (1993) stated, “The presence of a culturally different person in a counseling group has more implications than a mere difference in birthplace or ethnic origin” (p. 87).

CREDIBILITY

With this theme, participants’ comments reflect their perspectives as clients and as counselors. Credibility, as discussed by Sue and Zane (1987), is directly “related to the much discussed notions of expectancy, trust, faith, and effectiveness in therapy” (p. 40). The participants discussed three areas related to this notion of credibility: (a) empowerment, (b) bonding, and (c) essential qualities.

Counselor Perspective

Empowerment Empowerment, according to McWhirter (1994), means that powerless people are made aware of the debilitating power dynamics in their lives and are helped to regain and exercise control. Joshua and Shawn, more humanistic in their comments, implied that all clients have the innate potential to self-empower, and the job of counselors is to help them discover or tap this sometimes dormant potential. What Joshua considered successful is “allowing that person to come into balance and bring about closure of an event or an incident in their lives.” Shawn, on the other hand, felt that

[o]nce they find that answer inside, they will be able to use whatever they’ve learn[ed] about themselves inside to be able to function outside. It works for those who want it to work and for whoever is willing to give it a try and willing to take a look at themselves, and change if necessary.

Bonding With the Client Concurrent with empowerment is a sense of bonding with the client. This is illustrated in the following statements. Joshua, as a counselor facilitating a veterans’ rap group, reflected on the message he tries to convey to other Vietnam veteran group members: “Me telling you that I’m not perfect, and you’re not the worst individual in the world with the things that you are going through, I have been through”; and Shawn evaluated her feedback to her clients as follows: “Instilling some type of hope. Allowing them the opportunity to do some inward looking and time to trust. I let the client tell me about him or her and just go from there.”

Essential Qualities For these African American clients, the most important step involves a more personal approach to communicating with the client, such as Joshua’s statement that counselors should “bring a person to a state of balance and closure of an incident in their lives,” and Shawn’s thought that counselors should “always be willing and open to listen to the client.” Yet, this does not seem to negate the need for skill and expertise. Joshua stated, “Training and education can go a long way in helping bring about a lot of enlightenment. By the same token, experience is great.”

Client's Perspective

Empowerment McWhirter's (1994) theme of empowerment as aiding clients in regaining and exercising control by focusing on clients' internal strengths continued in Joshua's and Shawn's client perspectives on empowerment.

Joshua commented,

The way a man thinks in his heart, so is he; I had to go through a long transition just to get to this point. It really helped me to come into focus, into balance with what was going on in my life at that time. And knowing that what I was going through wasn't an isolated thing, it helped, very much so.

Shawn commented that because counseling was a safe place for her to speak openly and freely, she was able to do some self-reflecting: "I was willing to go back, go back and continue looking at things."

Sharing and Bonding Joshua found counselor self-disclosure to be helpful and bonding: "He shared with us his experiences about going through the same thing that we were going through. Knowing that what I was going through wasn't an isolated thing helped." Similarly, Shawn was able to explore some personal issues because of the counselor's sharing. "I was able to look at some of the things going on within myself and to talk freely and openly about them, not feeling like I would be judged. She was real genuine with me and open."

Essential Qualities Several studies investigating race in conjunction with other variables have suggested that race in and of itself is not a stable predictor of a client's preference for a counselor (Atkinson, Furlong, & Poston, 1986; Cimboric, 1972; Parham & Helms, 1981). Rather, variables such as the counselor's skill level, expertise, and experience are more salient factors.

In their own therapy, Joshua and Shawn believed that most of the credit for the success of the sessions was due to the skill of the counselor. Joshua stated, "Even though it was an informal group session, it was a successful one and a powerful one because the facilitator was able to bring us to a closure." Shawn stated, "As counseling went on, I realized that I was willing to take a chance because there was nothing in that first session to make me think that this woman wasn't competent, not capable of doing counseling."

In Summary

Certainly, the African American participants' educational training to a degree has influenced their professional roles, at least in terms of skill building and professional experience. However, their graduate training did very little to formally prepare them for working with ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse clients. Joshua felt that the purpose of the formal training that he received from his graduate studies was to expose him to the cultural shock of the academic environment. He stated, "Very much so, having to deal with these differences. The whole experience has been an experience." Most of the training has come from initiatives taken by them,

such as attending workshops, doing research on culturally diverse groups, and getting involved in different cultures.

In the perceptions of these African American participants, the concept of *credibility* in the effectiveness in therapy, evidenced through empowerment, sharing, bonding, and essential qualities, was shared. In their roles as counselors and clients, the themes of internal strengths, a sense of balance, and self-disclosure emerged. They discovered credibility with the help of competent, skilled counselors and a willingness and strength to look inside. With the counselors' self-disclosure, genuineness, and nonjudgmental stance, they could take the risk and learn to trust mental health professionals.

CULTURE

Along with the awareness that mental health delivery systems in the United States are not adequately meeting the needs of persons coming from different cultural, ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, there is the challenge to develop effective methods for reducing attrition and premature termination once African Americans have actually entered treatment. In the counseling and psychotherapy literature, several factors have been identified and several strategies proposed to address these issues. Multicultural counseling and psychotherapy research recognizes that the key components of multicultural competence include the development of awareness, knowledge, and skill with respect to ethnically and racially different groups. In the forefront of culturally sensitive or responsive counseling is knowledge of a client's culture.

Cultural Knowledge

On the BRIAS, both African American participants' scores placed them in the internalization stage of racial identity development. According to Helms (1990), the main motif of the internalization stage is "the Internalization of a positive personally relevant Black identity" (p. 28). Helms further described persons in the internalization stage as able to find value in people who are culturally different and as no longer needing to judge people by their cultural, racial, or ethnic group memberships. Similarly, as persons in the internalization stage, the African American participants were able to practice comfortably with people from different cultures. Their advice for counselors working in cross-cultural or multicultural situations is that, minimally, some insight is needed when counseling culturally different clients. Likewise, they caution that counselors have to take precautions not to overgeneralize this cultural knowledge and unthinkingly apply it to every client without regard to individual differences existing in that culture.

Joshua commented, "To deal with people from different ethnic backgrounds, you need to have at least some sort of insight into where they come from and how to deal with them." Shawn commented, "To me, there is a cultural piece that is involved, and not that every person will be exactly like what we read about in the multicultural book, but just that awareness gives us information about the client."

Dialoguing

As counselors, the African American participants were able to connect with the African American clients who spoke and understood their language. Shawn said simply, "The people in my community, my church or whatever, we just have an understanding about words or language." According to Joshua, he identified and communicated with his people by speaking their language, and when he spoke to them with his educated, bourgeois male language, they would come to him and say, "Pastor, you're using those fifty cent words."

Culture-Centered Networks and Interventions

Because of the large numbers of African Americans who tend to shun counseling and the fact that counseling is viewed negatively in the African American community, the African American participants felt that there was a need for and a method of integrating natural support systems in counseling. Joshua explained,

Many will go to the pastor rather than to a psychiatrist, which is viewed as negative. Bring in the family, the church, and other support systems. Counseling is chosen in the African American community when these two support systems come together and agree you need counseling.

Shawn explained,

Some counseling is seen in a negative light, and people are not willing to be open to that. Explore something different, the family, the church, just not being heard by the counselor. First ask the clients if they would be willing to have a family member participate with them.

HEMGROWN REPRESENTATION

Several researchers, such as Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (2003) and Sue and Sue (2007), have stated that increased minority representation in counseling and psychotherapy is critical to the establishment of a multicultural program. The African American participants have also witnessed personally and professionally how the lack of minority representation in all areas of counseling has adversely affected African Americans' participation in counseling, and therefore they have become advocates for a leadership that reflects the ethnic and racial breakdown of its clientele.

Joshua commented, "There are only a few African American agency supervisors who are in counseling, and those African Americans are assisting instead of being in training where they can impart this information."

Shawn commented,

We are a minority as far as numbers and things like that. It just keeps it real to me, like reality to me. I do want to focus on minorities and minority programs. I do want to do that, and I think that more people are starting to accept counseling in a way.

IN SUMMARY

One of the guiding research questions in this study is “What are the racial identity stages of development, the level of acculturation, and the level of multicultural competencies and skills of the ethnic and racial counselor educators in training, and how do they perceive and view these factors?” Neither participant self-described as fully acculturated to the majority culture; rather, they were more bicultural. They both reported very deep ties to the African American community. For example, Shawn said that she was immersed in her family, her church, and social events with people who were like her. Similarly, Joshua said, in describing his relationship to his community, that he felt blessed and privileged to be a part of his community and to build his home there.

Under the theme of culture, overall, the African American participants’ knowledge and sensitivity were important to the client culture, but not just to lump everyone from that cultural background together. They believed that using African American language improved the quality of their relationship with African American clients. In terms of assessing the role that indigenous systems played in working through life events rather than using counseling services, these participants found that a collaborative approach with the natural support systems in the African American community works well with African American clients. In terms of professional roles, they advocated an increase in African American representation, believing that it could have a positive effect on the entire field of counseling and psychotherapy.