

BIBLIOTHERAPY & GROUP COUNSELING WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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CHALLENGES FACING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- African American students make up 14% of students on campus compared to 58% of Caucasian students (US Department of Education, 2018).
- The cultural infrastructure of PW colleges and universities do not reflect the experiences of African American students (Jones & Sam, 2018).
- Such experiences create cultural isolation (Jones & Sam, 2018) and more reports of racism and negative perceptions of campus among many African American students (Ancis, Sedlacek, Mohr, 2000; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

CHALLENGES FACING AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

- African American college students may have more psychological distress than their collegiate peers (Love, 2008).
- African American college students have underutilize the counseling center (Davidson, Yakusha & Sandford-Marten, 2004) and have tepid use (Hayes et al, 2011) for many reasons:
 - Differences in help-seeking behaviors (Duncan & Johnson, 2007)
 - Stigma and self-stigma (Cheng, Kwan & Sevig, 2013)
 - Desire for same race counselors (Thompson, Bazile, Akbar, 2004)

NON-TRADITIONAL INTERVENTIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Non-traditional interventions have been viewed as well-suited and more beneficial for African American college students (Grier-Reed, 2013).
- Many new non-traditional interventions focus on group work such as a group for Black college women regarding their ethno-cultural concerns (Jones & Sam, 2018) and an informal networking groups with African American college students (Grier-Reed, 2013).
- While other interventions have been non-traditional techniques like the use of human story telling (Vereen, Hill, & Butler, 2013; Vereen et al, 2006), and spirituality (Constantine et al 2000).

BIBLIOTHERAPY AND GROUP COUNSELING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

- This current study like other forms of non-traditional interventions offer specialists in group work and college counselors more options to work with African American college students.
- African American college students were given the popular book, "Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man," as a bibliotherapeutic intervention. These students also participated in a group experience.

A FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

- African American college-aged men and women are rarely discussed on campus even though these relationships are affected by societal issues like racism and stereotypes. Such as "relationships between African American men and women have become increasingly complex and tenuous," (Bethea, 1995).
- The status that African American women hold may impact the interactions within these relationships. For example, sixty percent of doctorates and 70 percent of master's degrees are held by African American women (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2018). They also make up 15.5 % of total fall enrollment whereas men made up 12.2% (US Department of Education, 2018)

A FOCUS ON THIS INTERVENTION

- The use of creative arts in therapy promoted interpersonal learning and intercultural appreciation such that bibliotherapy could provide (Henderson & Gladding, 1998).
- Bibliotherapy within the context of group counseling could promote trust and safety within African American college students who tend to be mistrustful of therapy.
- This intervention could help students face challenging issues in a non-threatening manner and students could align themselves with characters and situations (Schliebner, 1992).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- The purpose of the study was to explore the use of bibliotherapy with group counseling for African American college students to understand how this intervention promoted a transformative experience.
- There were two questions guiding this study:
 - How did African American college students experience the use of bibliotherapy and group counseling as an intervention?
 - What transformative experience occurred as a result of participating in this intervention?

METHODOLOGY- CASE STUDY DESIGN

- "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case description and case-based themes," (Creswell, 2007, p. 73).
- There are three types of qualitative case studies and each type is determined by the size of the bounded case (Creswell, 2007). Intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself and its uniqueness whereas instrumental case study explores one case with one issue or concern (Creswell, 2007). This study was a collective case study since it highlighted multiple case studies involving one issue or concern (Creswell, 2007).

METHODOLOGY- CASE STUDY DESIGN

- "Case studies may be used as an exemplar of standard practice for innovative or explanatory purposes," (Scholl, 2018, p.86) as in the case of this research study.
- Few studies have examined this innovative intervention involving the use of bibliotherapy and group counseling with African American college students.
- "Case studies are important resources contributing to...the advancement of specialized knowledge essential to effectively serving the needs of clients," (Scholl, 2018, p.81).
- Researchers used a case study design to explore how African American college students experienced the innovative intervention and how they described the transformative experience which occurred after the intervention.

METHODOLOGY-PROCEDURES

- After receiving human subjects institutional review approval, we developed flyers and posted them around campus to advertise for this group counseling experience and a free multicultural text.
- Researchers obtained a grant from the university to purchase the multicultural books and supplies like notebooks so students could write their reflections while participating in the group counseling experience.
- Students were encouraged to read *Act Like a Lady and Think Like a Man* (Harvey, 2009) as they took part in the group counseling experience. Chapters in the book were entitled: "The Ninety-Day Rule: Getting the Respect You Deserve," "How to Get the Ring," "Five Questions Every Woman Should Ask Before She Gets in Too Deep," and "Why Men Cheat," (Harvey, 2009) and the group leaders used themes from the chapters to structure the discussions in the group each week.

METHODOLOGY-PROCEDURES

- Two African American doctoral students served as group leaders. One was a woman and the other was a man. Gender and racial matching was done because researchers wanted the group leaders to be familiar with the cultural background and lived experience of African American college students.
- Furthermore, researchers believed it was also important to the success of the group counseling experience since the mixed gender of the group leaders could facilitate a balanced discussion on the issues facing African American college-aged women and men in relationships.
- Both doctoral students were trained as therapists at the master's level and completed several multicultural counseling courses to establish their cultural competence to facilitate the group. The group experience was supervised by a faculty who was a licensed mental health professional.

METHODOLOGY-PROCEDURES

- We recruited eight African American students to take part in the group counseling experience but only seven participated. The bibliotherapy and group counseling experience was held on campus in a group room within a training clinic.
- The training clinic was a convenient and comfortable location that worked for this group as it was a safe location that ensured confidentiality.
- Researchers attended the first group counseling session and extended an invitation to group members to participate in the study. We discussed the project and distributed the informed consent documents. We also handed out the following: demographic questionnaires, the multicultural books, and spiral notebooks. And we obtained the contact information of potential research participants.

METHODOLOGY-PROCEDURES

- At the first group counseling session, group members had a chance to ask researchers questions about the research project and the informed consent documents. Researchers discussed activities which were completing an interview with researchers following the 10-week group experience and keeping a weekly journal to write about their reflections and reactions to the discussions.
- Patton (2002) and Creswell (1998) suggests that qualitative results should be gathered from different types of data collection. However, in our experience with the bibliotherapy and group counseling intervention only two of the three students wrote some reflections in the notebooks, however, the students did not write in the journals each week as instructed.
- After the group counseling experience ended, participants had to attend an in-person interview with researchers discussing their experiences in group counseling using the multicultural book. To schedule the in-person interviews, researchers contacted the seven participants. However, there were only three participants willing to continue with the research process.

METHODOLOGY-DATA ANALYSIS

- Researchers interviewed the three students in this study. Interview questions were both structured and semi-structured. Interviews were an hour and a half.
- The interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. Next, one researcher analyzed the transcripts using the four stages recommended by Creswell (1998). These stages were: 1) using a psychological lens to read through the transcribed data, 2) looking for themes and coding the information, 3) transforming the data into applicable terms and meaning associated with counseling and group work, and 4) developing summaries from the data (Creswell, 1998).
- After developing summaries from the transcripts, the researcher sent the summaries to the participants to review and she scheduled the follow-up in-person meeting. During the in-person follow-up meeting, which lasted less than thirty minutes, the participants were asked to verify if the information we gathered from the in-person interviews was accurate and reflected their answers to our questions. This process is called member checking which allowed participants to validate their stories (Richards, 2010). Through the member checking process, we established the accuracy of the data gathered.

METHODOLOGY-DATA ANALYSIS

- After establishing the accuracy of the data, data analysis began. An inductive process was used to allow the researchers to work through the data to develop themes across stages of the group process (Creswell, 2007).
- First, relationships and patterns were used to develop codes for each transcript. Then, codes from each transcript were reorganized into categories. Finally, thematic statements were assigned to all coding categories and sub-categories that illustrate the common ideas across all transcripts.
- In the final step of data analysis, researchers used an auditor to ensure rigor of this study (Creswell, 2013). The auditor read through the transcripts and established their own themes from the data. Then, the researchers reviewed the themes from the auditor and compared them to the themes we developed. We determined that the themes discovered in this study were trustworthy since they were consistent and similar to the ones developed by the auditor.

RESULTS-CASE EXAMPLES

- Kerrington, who was a senior, is an African American woman. She was encouraged to join the bibliotherapy and group counseling experience by a friend and reported she enjoyed using the book as a supplement with the group experience.
- She also saw the movie based upon the book and noted that she wanted to identify differences between the movie and the book for the group counseling experience. Her overall opinions about the group were positive.
- She reported to interviewers that if the book was not used then group members would not have likely been as open. Additionally, she reported that group members shared personal experiences in the group and would have likely been more politically correct without the book.
- According to Kerrington, having the book allowed her the flexibility to provide examples from the book if she did not feel comfortable sharing personal experiences. Kerrington also participated in the journaling aspect of the group experience and reported the journaling experience allowed her the chance to write down exactly what she was thinking when someone in the group made a comment.

RESULTS-CASE EXAMPLES

- Daphne, who was a senior, is an African American woman. She reported she joined the group because of the extra credit offered by her professor. She reported her overall experience was good and told us she thought using the book along with group counseling was a good idea because it provided the group with a starting place for discussion each week.
- Additionally, she said the book allowed her to elaborate on each topic during the group and she told interviewers the group experience allowed her to "branch out of her shell." According to Daphne, the journaling aspect of the experience allowed her to write down her thoughts and recap things from the group discussion.

RESULTS-CASE EXAMPLES

- Simba, who was a senior, is an African American man. He joined the group because of encouragement from a few of his friends. He also shared with interviewers that the topic of discussion was also intriguing and it drew him to the group counseling experience.
- His motivation for joining the group was his desire to get a better understanding on why women felt certain topics of the book were important. He stated his initial intent was not necessarily to make changes but to get a better understanding. His overall opinion about his experience in the group was very positive. He said it was a great experience because he had the opportunity to engage in discussions that promoted growth and knowledge.

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- In the initial stage of group process, group members rely heavily upon the direction of the group leader (Wheelan, Davidson, & Tiliin, 2003). However, Simba, Daphne, and Kerrington noted how critical the multicultural book was during this initial stage in the group counseling experience. These students felt the book provided some guidance, direction and structure to the group. Here are some direct quotations from the students.

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Simba said:
 - "Yes, because it [the book] kept everybody on a timeline or a topic, you know. Anytime somebody tried getting too far away, we would always, you know, go back to "Alright, we're not going to be going in a circle now, the topic of this week is this, we're not going to go back to a chapter 17 days ago, because we obviously realized that we cannot come to an understanding on this topic, it's time to move on."
- Kerrington said:
 - "I enjoyed it [the book] because I think it kind of helped us to lay a foundation of what the conversation would be about or where we would go. Even if we didn't stay completely on topic with the book, it kind of sparked up conversation and allowed us to interact with each other... and kind of gain information from one another in the group".

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Daphne said:
 - "It gave me kind of a guide to know what to talk about within the group so I won't have to...umm kind of just go off will in a way cuz it's usually hard for me to find words to say. So, to be able to have a guide kind of what this week was going to be talking about was good for me."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Within the middle stage of group counseling, group members tend to experience the norming stage of the group experience. Some of the characteristics of this stage include lack of trust and commitment to the group (Wheelen, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003) and such issues are typically worked through during the norming stage.
- The three African American students in this case study reported the multicultural text really facilitated safety and comfort which created an atmosphere within the group that allowed them to speak freely and spark conversation with other members of the group

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Kerrington said:
- "Let's see...I think that it [the book] allowed for us not to have to think so much about relationships or about our own personal relationships. We could take examples from the book and talk about those things versus feeling the pressure to give a personal experience...for those who didn't want to open up in that way. So, it kind of allowed us to give our opinions on things in the book without giving personal experiences."
- "I think that it helped because the book was...it did a really good job of umm being relatable and being honest. Often times, I did kind of wait for the responses of others to kind of get an idea of "ok how far can I actually go" with my response. But sometimes I tried to be as honest as possible just to spark other ideas or maybe allow other people to be more comfortable to express their opinion."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Daphne said:
- "I think it was good because I don't talk much in a group setting. I am usually the quieter one, so I feel like if it was me and only one other person, it would have been much of a different experience because I would have probably had to talk even more and I probably would have felt a little bit more... not so uncomfortable, but I would have probably felt bad 'cause I would've felt that the group wasn't going so well because I am not participating as much. So, seeing it was about seven of us all together, because I was...it gave me kind of time to branch out of my shell and talk for myself without having to feel like I'm not talking enough. Cuz there was still like constant conversation going on, so I know they still got stuff out of the group."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Also during the middle stage of this intervention involving bibliotherapy and group counseling, the topic of gender in relationships came up because of the open atmosphere established and the specific chapters in the multicultural book. The chapters that guided discussions on gender were "The 90-Day Rule," "What Drives Men," and "How to Get the Ring." The three African American college students were asked about what learn from the group experience. Although there were many responses, some of them focused on gender in relationships.

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Daphne said:
- "Umm... I learned that I am a very...more so emotional person, and I need to...I feel like I need to get more of a grasp on my emotions. I let them sometimes get the best of me and guys are usually more logical. I feel like because we are...females are more emotional and guys are more logical, sometimes when we get into an argument about the same things that I can say in like a lower tone I sort of like.... I sometimes yell it or I will start crying. Sometimes it is just not as big as a situation that I sometimes make it. So, the group has helped me realize that about myself. Sometimes it is easier to take a break or take a breath and be able to just know in your head to just reevaluate whatever you are going through and don't be so emotional about it. You can still verbalize what you are trying to say, just in a different way".

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- Simba said:
- "The ladies would want to continue discussing the 90-day rule, but the topic was no longer important to the gentlemen. It was interesting to read the book and hear the women in the group reinforce and set standard[s] for men."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- At the final stage of the group counseling experience using bibliotherapy, group members reflected upon their experiences, expressed gratitude to the other group members, and have appreciation for the group experience as a whole (Wheelen, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003).
- When reflecting upon using bibliotherapy within the group experience, all three of the students discussed reflections on what they learned the multicultural book and the group counseling experience. This learning could be summarized into three concepts: shared learning, introspective learning, and perspective-taking.

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- (Shared Learning) Simba said:
 - "I would have definitely enjoyed it [the book], just because it [the book] sets me in a class, or not a class that sounds iffy to me, but it sets me in a subgroup of individuals who have taken a step forward and are stimulating their minds through some kind of growth-seeking environment, whether it be educationally or reading about some topic that they may know nothing about or a topic that they do know something about, and then speaking on it, you know. Communication and discussions lead to a better understanding with whatever we learn about. So, it didn't even matter if the topic was about birds. [Laughs] I don't really care too much about birds, but I know that I want to be learning something and that would excite me."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- (Introspective Learning) Daphne said:
 - "It actually opened my eyes, having the book. Because certain things that were inside the book I...it's like I didn't realize about myself, but being able to read it, it made me um take a look and evaluate myself based on the book. And it makes me kind of learn more about myself. So, it branched off into the group and I was able to give the group examples. Someone in the group said it was good hearing my examples and hearing that the book was working for me. I don't know if that answered the question [laughs]. Also, since we were all reading the same thing, it gave me an opportunity to share my opinion from what I got out of the book, compared to the next person, because we could all read the same thing but pick up different things and take away different things from that same topic."

RESULTS-INTERVENTION ACROSS THE GROUP STAGE PROCESS

- (Perspective-Taking) Kerrington said:
 - "I would say that it enhanced [my learning] because it [the book] allowed me to see a different perspective... and kind of step outside of my normal response and see it, and try to be more understanding of someone else's point of view. At the end of the group, I was able to say that... you know given the current situations I have kind of sat back, thought about them and my responses were different. And the outcome was better."

RESULTS-TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

- The three African American students reported their transformations below.
- Daphne said:
 - "This experience helped me to realize that I was more of an emotional person than I initially thought. The group helped me realize that about myself. I realize that sometimes it's best to take a step back and not get so emotional."
- Simba said:
 - "I learned that it is important to have patience. Patience with yourself and patience with the opposite sex. I also realized that men are more logical and women are more emotional, but I am making efforts to be okay with showing emotions."
- Kerrington said:
 - "I can now understand other people's point of view which allowed me to think about it and at times change my way of thinking. I also learned that communication is important in relationships. Specifically, instead of making assumptions I have learned it is important to understand what the person wants you to take from the communication."

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPECIALISTS IN GROUP WORK AND COLLEGE COUNSELORS

- This intervention fostered an awareness of their intrapersonal intelligence in the form of learning for the three African American college students in this case study. Such that, they described an awareness of their shared learning, introspective learning, and perspective taking.
- All of this points to intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner (1983) as cited by Matto and colleagues (2006) described intrapersonal intelligence as the capacity to understand oneself, to have a working model of oneself that includes one's desires, fears, and capacities, and the capacity to use the information about self in regulating one's life and their decisions. Their intrapersonal intelligence helped to facilitate their reported transformations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPECIALISTS IN GROUP WORK AND COLLEGE COUNSELORS

- Specialist in group work and college counselors may consider using bibliotherapy and group counseling with African American students if they desire an intervention that promotes greater awareness of intrapersonal intelligence.
- Specialist in group work and college counselors could also use this intervention when they desire to tackle difficult issues with college students in a way that provides support, shared learning, perspective-taking and introspection.

LIMITATIONS

- The first limitation involves the lack of variation in class status who were seniors.
- This lack of variation in class status was significant, in that, it constrained our ability to transfer the findings to African American college students broadly. And it limited our ability to compare and contrast responses to the intervention based on class status. Since the students in this study were all seniors and researchers examined how they experienced and were transformed by the intervention, it was unclear if African American college students who were freshman, sophomores, or even juniors would respond the same way to the intervention.
- Furthermore, we do not know the extent to which class status and maturity of the African American students in this case study influenced their recognition in the need to use intrapersonal intelligence in relationships which was fostered by the intervention.

LIMITATION

- A second limitation of this study involved the researchers' inability to obtain data from multiple sources. Patton (2002) and Creswell (1998) asserted that qualitative research should include data from different sources and yet researchers were unable to obtain the completed journal responses from the participants. Researchers suggested various ways in which we would have revamped the journaling aspect of this study if we were to conduct it again.
- However, the lack of data in the weekly journals from participants limited our ability to analyze how the experience of transformation for the three African American college students in this study evolved over time.

LIMITATION

- A third limitation of this study involves limited discussions on race and African American male-female relationships within the group counseling experience. And this issue was a primary factor for researchers to focus on relationships for the group counseling experience.
- However, this topic did not come up in the discussions within the group. This happened because the group leaders used the multicultural book to structure the discussions in the group.
- Consequently, the book did not include topics on race and African American male-female relationships. In fact, the multicultural book provided plenty of opportunities for the participants to discuss issues of gender within the group experience.

AREA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- An area for future research could be replicating this study with different groups of students who tend to be marginalized or underrepresented groups on campus and using different themes for the group experience.
- While this study did not broach the topic of race within African American male-female relationships, it remains an area upon which counselors and specialists in group work need to become more familiar with in order to better serve African American clients struggling with relationship issues.
- However, there is a need for more studies that highlight culturally relevant interventions for African American college students.

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