



Building Professional Excellence- Part 4
Session 1: Identity, Trauma, Culture and History: Understanding the Dynamics of
Counseling African Americans

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Dr. Robert A. Horne.

1. Question from Allen Vosburg

Would you address the percentage rate of crime with the percentage rate of religious beliefs in African Americans?

Answer

This question is too broad for me to address in this forum. However, please feel free to contact me directly with a more specific question and I will do my best to provide you with a response.

2. Question from Brandon Barton

Is there a more appropriate term other than African-American???? There seems to be a divide on appropriate term.

Answer

Since its popularization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the term African-America is currently the most appropriate term used to describe US citizens born in America of African descent. However, on an individual basis it is always best to check with the individual to see how they self-identify.

3. Question from Carmen Gutierrez

How much of one's perspective of racism (i.e., Brown vs. the board of Ed.). I would like to know how you see the family's part in discrimination.

Answer

A broad answer to your question as it relates to African Americans perspective can be seen in this statement from a study conducted by Stevenson, Davis, & Abdul-Kabir (2001), "Racial socialization is the primary vehicle of cultural transmission for African American families, steeped in a tradition of resistance to oppression and embedded in "conversations and actions that communicate to [our] children how to survive with dignity and pride in a racist world" (p. 46).

Stevenson HC, Davis G, Abdul-Kabir S. Stickin' to, watchin' over, and gettin' with: An African American parent's guide to discipline. San Francisco: Josey-Bass; 2001.

From a counselor's perspective, racism and one's response to racism can be viewed as learned behaviors. Albert Bandura, one of the world's leading theorist on social learning, suggests learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction. As such, a child's family greatly influences their view of the world and others. Since children are often exposed to racial perspectives prior to developing the cognitive ability to challenge the rationale of such beliefs these beliefs are often accepted as fact and embedded in a child's psyche at an early age. This may result in racial perspectives becoming a core part of an individual's identity. (Again, keep in mind racial perspectives are learned and not innate.)

4. Question from Constance Hastings

Are African Americans more likely to reach out to pastoral counselors?

Answer

Overwhelmingly, studies show African American are more likely to reach out to their pastors for counseling. However, it is important to note, “clergy are not receiving educational experiences that equip them to handle these issues in a way that coincides with counseling methods promoted today (evidence-based practice); “clergy are largely unprepared to meet the mental health needs of parishioners (Bledsoe and Adams 2011)” (Payne, 2014).

Payne, J. S. (2014). The Influence of Secular and Theological Education on Pastors’ Depression Intervention Decisions. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 53(5), 1398–1413. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-013-9756-4>

5. Question from Crista Nezhni

Is the term collective consciousness addressed a lot in religion in the African American community? How can a counselor help reduce tension with a client if so?

Answer

The concept of collectivity is addressed throughout Traditional African Religions (TAR) (i.e., Bantu, Yoruba, etc.) and carries through the Invisible Church/Slave Religion and into the modern Black Church identity. It is an indelible part of the African American culture and psyche. As a note, in traditional African culture there is no division between the human being and god/spiritual being and all individuals are linked. This includes the living, deceased, and yet to be born. Likewise, in Traditional African Religion human beings are linked to all existence (i.e., lakes, animals, rocks, etc.). Humans as beings with volition are considered Muntu while things without volition are Kintu. This relationship is similar to what is seen in many Native American cultures as well as in other collectivist cultures. As such, the individual, is always recognized as an individual who is one part of the collectivist group. While this concept is thousands of years old in African culture aspects of it can be seen in modern psychology’s Tripartite Self (i.e., Individual-Self, Relational-Self, and Collective-Self).

Counselors can assist clients by helping them to: 1) identify and understand the 3 different elements that compose the one being; 2) helping clients isolate the thoughts and behaviors associated with each element; 3) addressing the element of self that is most closely associated with the treatment area of concern; and 4) helping the client understand how changes in one element may impact the other elements of self. However, in order to do this counselors must initially apply a holistic counseling approach that is able to address the entire person and not just the area of concern.

6. Question from Daniel Burrell

Does the recent DSM manual help to lessen this?

Answer

This question needs to be more specific in order for me to address it in detail. However, what I will say is an addition to the DSM-5 is the Cultural Formation Interview which assist in helping counselors identify and addresses clients’ cultural issues that may impact the counseling process.

7. Question from Daniel Burrell

Given the PTSD element, how does one develop a good self-concept?

Answer

By PTSD I am assuming you mean Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome and not Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I address this client concern by using narrative theory to help individuals *relocate* their origin story from its typical origin point in African American slavery to pre-slavery Africa and Africans' rich traditional history. In my opinion, one of the major problems with locating one's origin in a depressed, oppressed and/or traumatic location is one starts out in a hole and in a defensive position that they are continually trying to overcome with no history of success. Without any history of success it becomes extremely difficult for one to envision themselves as successful. Therefore, it becomes essential to help people see a time when they or their ancestors were successful. It's a place of pride and hope and both are essential for creating positive counseling outcomes.

8. Question from Ida Duplechin

Does Dr. Horne experience "token" positions affecting people and also "imposter syndrome" because of that?

Answer

Tokenism is the practice of making representative effort of being inclusive to members of an underrepresented groups by hiring/promoting a small number of people from that group for appearance sake. From my experience as a well-educated African American male, and as a counselor, many African Americans recognize this is sometimes the case with employers and organizations seeking to appear inclusive. However, I would say this issue is more complex than it appears on the surface. Case in point, there are a number of counseling programs in which there are no African American faculty or only 1 African American faculty member. Is this because of tokenism or because less than 1% of African Americans have a Ph.D. which is a requirement to teach in a counselor education program? I would agree this can be related to imposter syndrome in the sense that if one feels they are only a token they may not feel they deserve to be in a stated position or feel unqualified to be in a stated position. In my personal experience as a counselor, I seldom see cases where this is major concern among African American in part or as a whole. More often what I see is African Americans who one may consider in token positions as having concerns related to stress and depression associated with feelings of isolation. This is not unexpected since feelings of tokenism and imposter syndrome are typically related to feelings of low self-esteem. Also the preponderance of studies show African Americans generally have self-esteem levels equal to or higher than European Americans. Additionally, there are a lot of other socio-political factors that play a role in how African Americans view themselves in relation to tokenism and imposter syndrome as well. Most notably to me, is the fact that typically African Americans reach an equivalent level of power and authority as European Americans at a later age in life. As such, by the time many African Americans reach an equivalent level of power and authority as European Americans many feel they are equally or better qualified than their peers. So again, for the typical African American in a position of power and authority, the issue is not tokenism or imposter syndrome, but isolation on the job and in the African American community. The latter is due to the diminishing amount of peers at the same socio-economic-status as one moves higher on the SES/educational scale.



9. Question from Irma Ross

How would you address this with a client to help them take meds?

Answer

When I work with clients who are reluctant to take meds I: 1) talk to the client and try to identify and understand the root cause of their reluctance; 2) determine whether the client's reluctance is associated with their mental health/substance use concern or whether it is related to a cultural phenomenon; 3) assist the client in understanding exactly what the medication is and how it works; 4) assist the client in understanding the pros and cons of taking the medication as prescribed; 5) in some cases assist the client in finding a medicine that is taken less frequently (e.g., 1 shot every 30 days instead of 1 pill every day); and ultimately let the client take ownership of their meds and treatment plan. In specific cases where a client's reluctance to take medicine is associated with their distrust in health professionals I address the client's feelings of distrust first and then compliance. Ultimately, I provide the client with as much information as possible and allow the client to take ownership of their medicine plan.

10. Question from LaToya Claxton

What is the name of the book?

Answer

The book I encourage anyone working with African American males to read is Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America (1993) by Richard Majors & Janet Mancini Billson.

11. Question from Pamela Thomas

Also don't you think how African Americans were treated after slavery has an impact and continued trauma?

Answer

The answer is yes. While slavery may be identified as the root cause of African Americans' collective trauma and identity and post traumatic slave syndrome it has been and is continually reinforced by socio-political-environmental factors post-slavery (i.e., systemic oppression in employment, judicial oppression, inequality of wages, microaggressions, racism/hate crimes, American concepts of beauty, etc.). I believe one of the major challenges to African Americans psychological health is the ongoing stress of surviving and prospering in a continued hostile environment. I do not have the space to go into detail here but I invite you to examine some of the studies which highlight psycho-social stressors and African Americans and the impact they have on African American physical and psychological health. Likewise, note African Americans coping skills and coping resources.

12. Question from Susan Bulsza

We say Caucasian, Latino, or Asian, What would be the appropriate term to use for Americans that have Black characteristics?

Answer

See question 2.

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