

Innovations in Counseling: Working With Minority Populations (Part 9 Session 5)
Treating African American Clients in Therapy: A Primer for Clinical Practice
Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session With
Shana Lewis, PhD, NCC, LPC

Question from L. Dickter:

Any ideas for career counseling African American clients/students?

Answer from Presenter

As stated in the session the intersectionality of race and gender will play a role in various aspects of African American clients experiences, including career. Following are questions or considerations you may want to think about when discussing career choices and options with African American clients.

What perceptions does the client hold about whether certain occupations are “open” or “closed”; to African-Americans? What range of exposure has he or she had to the wide range of opportunities within the world of work? What barriers does the client perceive in the educational or work environment? What strategies can the client plan to overcome potential barriers? Does the client have access to available African-American role models, particularly across a range of occupational fields? What messages does the client hold regarding work? What messages does he or she perceive society as holding about African-American employees? What role do cultural and familial factors have in his or her career choice?

I’d also work with them to consider career options that are not stereotypical but that incorporate their vast array of creativity that is a natural resource that they may overlook.

Swanson, J. L., & Bowman, S. L. (1994). Career assessment with African-American clients. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 2(3), 210–225. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.shsu.edu/10.1177/106907279400200302>

Question from J. Ganachaud:

I thought the research suggested that body image was higher in AA and Black women than White. Is this inaccurate, or was the beauty standard slide more something to keep in mind when working with AA/Black women?

Answer from Presenter

The beauty slide was not based on the statistics. It was more about what to keep in mind when working with African American women.

Question from J. Mitchell:

Knowing many of the well-known and widely used assessment tools have been normed using majority groups, do you suggest any specific assessment tools which you feel give special attention to being culturally inclusive?

Answer from Presenter

It is important to be aware of the cultural application of any assessment that you use. I tend to use standard assessments but not alone. I always consider the cultural components of my clients experiences when interpreting the results. The assessment is just one part of the evaluation and not the whole. Remember to use your 3rd ear in assessing your clients no matter what tools you use.

If you are looking for a cultural assessment that measures racial trauma here is the link to the assessment, I mentioned in the presentation [Trauma Research & Measures | Lab for Culture and Mental Health Disparities](#)

If you are interested in training for Racial Trauma Therapy here's the link <https://drstevenkniffleyjr.com/racial-trauma-therapy-training/>

Question from A. Jaquelyn:

What specifically does playing the dozens look like?

Answer from Presenter

To engage in an informal contest in which one trades insults with someone about each other and each other's family members, especially their mothers, typically in front of a group. The insults are not meant to be taken seriously. Exclusive to African-American communities.

Playing the dozens consists of 'Your Mama Jokes'. These jokes are told back and forth between members of the group. In ordinary circumstances it would not be acceptable to tell jokes and say negative things about someone's mother, family or about them. When playing the dozens those involved understand these are jokes and do not typically become upset or offended. Remember these jokes started as a way to create a 'thick skin' to deal with the name calling that Black people endured.

Question from L. Topper:

As a White female counselor working in a predominately White, small town, I am interested to know if asking about a Black client's culture seen as me being interested or ignorant?

Answer from Presenter

This is a great question. It would not be seen as ignorant if you share with the client why you want to know. I would encourage you to share with them that you want to understand their experience so that you are better equipped to assist. This will improve rapport and help them to see you as caring and empathic vs ignorant.

Question from F. Zaidi:

How to help a Black client who has a struggle belonging in the Black culture and feels criticized by others in the Black community of not having knowledge of basic topical knowledge i.e. music, or tv shows?

Answer from Presenter

In the presentation I mentioned that every African American person's experience is different. It does not make one less 'Black' if they are unaware of mainstream concepts or topics relative to the culture. I would encourage the client to embrace their culture in the way that feels good to them. If they'd like to know more about their culture they can connect and research to do so. If they are fine with the knowledge they have but its their peers that feel they have a deficit, I would encourage them to find healthy ways to deal with criticism in general.

Question from A. Vosburg:

I was a teacher and counselor in various school districts. I worked in both predominately Black schools and White schools. My work in the Black schools there my education came from school parent monitors. These individuals would mentor me daily about the Black student culture and to understand that group. I was fortunate to get this welcomed training and personal educational process. I thank all of you for your time to make me a better person and counselor. What is your thought on this experience of mine?

Answer from Presenter

I think your experience was valuable. It is always most authentic to learn directly from the population and culture you are helping especially if you are from a different culture yourself. Its my hope that you continue to seek out opportunities to learn about minority or other disenfranchised populations so the work that you do can continue to come from an empathic place of understanding.