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Cultural Identity Development

GCN 615. OA.

Social and Cultural Foundations

10/15/2021

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Fall 2021

### **African American Culture**

I try to find the core values that are so fundamental that they transcend ethnic identity. That doesn't mean I run from it. I embrace African-American culture and I love it and embrace it, but it is a part of a human identity. So, I'm always trying to make a larger human statement (Wynton Marsalis, 2013). Slavery began in the late 1600's throughout the 1800's and still exist in 2021. According to Sue, D., Sue, D., Neville, H. and Smith, L., n.d. Counseling the culturally diverse, African American population was 46.3 million in 2015, representing about 13% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Overall, African Americans' economic health is significantly less stable than that of the general U.S. population. For example, the poverty rate for African Americans remains nearly twice as high as that of all households (25.4% versus 14.7%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), and the unemployment rate is over twice that of White Americans (9.5% versus 4.6%) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). There is also a wealth gap, with Whites having a net worth 13 times greater than African Americans (Pew Research Center, 2016). Of African American men, 38% are experiencing downward mobility out of the middle class, compared with 21% of White men (Acs, 2011). Further, infant mortality for Blacks is over twice that of Whites (Centers for Disease Control, 2013), and the lifespan of African Americans is 5–6 years shorter than that of White Americans. Although African Americans make up only 13% of the U.S. population, 40% of those incarcerated are Black, while Whites, who make up 64% of the population, account for only 39% of those in prison (Hagler, 2015). African American women are also more likely to be arrested than Latinas or White women (Brame, Bushway, Paternoster, & Turner, 2014). Although these statistics are grim, much of the literature is based on the economically disadvantaged rather than on other segments of the African American

population (Holmes & Morin, 2006). This focus on those living in poverty masks the great diversity that exists among African Americans and the significant variance in socioeconomic status, educational level, cultural identity, family structure, and reactions to racism. For example, 38% of African American households are middle income and 12% are upper income, compared with 44% and 26% of White households, respectively (Parlapiano, Gebeloff, & Carter, 2015). People of African descendants have experience historical and generational emotional amount of racism. African American was treated harshly by the white supremacy, lived without pay, bad living condition and still exist today.

### **Social Economic Status**

African American socioeconomic background from education, low income, health, housing takes account of depleting factors that qualifies family, parents, children, people the level of reliance on government income support and level of household overcrowding in society. Low socioeconomic status which is also known as (SES), households have little income and wealth to help against the negative impact of society. African American culture had experienced being mistakenly identified as being negative impact to society and develop an identity which can be negative or positive depending upon the experiences and support system. Many of the incidents and racism caused African American to attribute to bad attitude, mental health, low educational levels, housing, family structure, and reaction to racism. In research National Academies Press (US); 2004. 9, Race/Ethnicity, Socioeconomic Status, and Health, "The socioeconomic stratification that patterns American life, and differences in life for the major racial/ethnic groups, is assumed to be the root cause of these differences (Adler et al., 1994; Link and Phelan, 1995). People of different social statuses

lead lives that differ in almost all aspects childhood circumstances, educational experiences, work careers, marriage and family experiences, leisure, neighborhood conditions, and health care (Williams and Collins, 1995). Many of the effects of SES on health outcomes are indirect through a variety of life experiences, opportunities, or choices related to SES, beginning in early life and either cumulating or being tempered by later life situations. Health differences are observed throughout the lifecycle, and the general assumption is that differences diminish at older ages. Socioeconomic status is obviously related to race and ethnicity in the United States, but the role of socioeconomic factors as a cause of racial/ethnic health differences is complex. Many studies have documented the importance of blacks' low SES as a partial explanation for poor health outcomes relative to whites. Studies have also clarified that socioeconomic differences often do not “explain” all health differences between African Americans and non-Hispanic whites, with black-white differences in health remaining after controlling for socioeconomic conditions (Hayward et al., 2000).”

### **Strength and Characteristic of African American**

African American embraces their culture and language through the identity of their Afrocentric identity development, however, many black identify through socialization of the black culture. Family structure means a lot to African American and understanding the strength and character of African American family brings enlightenment to help solve a many of the issues that occurs in the system of black African American. Protective factors and strengths among African Americans include positive ethnic identity or racial pride; resourcefulness and coping skills to deal with societal issues; familial, extended kin, and

community support systems; flexible family roles; achievement orientation; and spiritual beliefs and practices (Kaslow et al., 2010; LaTaillade, 2006). Afro American hold dear to their ancestor who pave the way for them to stand on their shoulders such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Park, Frederick Douglass, and Maya Angelou, and many others. Black culture can be seen in language, family structure, music, dance, language, and so much more. It is about the individual and the community, the amount of money and giving back to the community. Characteristics of black culture inform American life in a multitude of ways. In their Perseverance/resilience: The persevering processes African Americans use to face adversity include many character strengths, such as positive outlook (hope), spirituality, religiousness, meaning-making, forgiveness, expression of empathy (social intelligence), compassion (kindness), gratitude, and humility (Mattis et al., 2016).

### **African American weakness**

In the African American culture many challenges start with the health of black people, for a discussion about cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, mental health shows a sign of weakness. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Black adults in the U.S. are more likely than white adults to report persistent symptoms of emotional distress, such as sadness, hopelessness and feeling like everything is an effort. Black adults living below the poverty line are more than twice as likely to report serious psychological distress than those with more financial security. Despite the needs, only one in three Black adults who need mental health care receive it. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Mental Health Facts for African Americans guide, they are also: Less likely to receive guideline-consistent care, less frequently included in research, more

likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists). In addition to weakness negative attitudes and beliefs towards people who live with mental health conditions is pervasive within the U.S. and can be particularly strong within the Black community. One study showed that 63% of Black people believe that a mental health condition is a sign of personal weakness. As a result, people may experience shame about having a mental illness and worry that they may be discriminated against due to their condition. For many in the Black community, it can be incredibly challenging to discuss the topic of mental health due to this concern about how they may be perceived by others. This fear could prevent people from seeking mental health care when they really need it. Additionally, many people choose to seek support from their faith community rather than seeking a medical diagnosis. In many Black communities in the U.S., the church, mosque or other faith institution can play a central role as a meeting place and source of strength.

### **Spirituality**

My mother raised eight kids on her own and her favorite scripture says “But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15 NIV), we didn’t have much possibility without being spiritual or religious, she was not about serving idols, but my life took another turn. Religion and spirituality are important to many African Americans, and serve as a protective factor in response to stressors; church participation provides comfort, economic support, and opportunities for self-expression, leadership, and community involvement. Over 75% of African Americans state that religion

is very important to them and rely on religious and spiritual communities to deal with mental health issues (Avent & Cashwell, 2015). Among a sample of low income African American children, those whose parents regularly attended church had fewer problems (Christian & Barbarin, 2001). Support systems connected with the church (including friends and club involvement) were found to promote resilience in African American undergraduates exposed to racial microaggressions (Watkins, Labarrie, & Appio, 2010). The African American church often functions as a religious, social, and political hub, facilitating social events that serve to foster a sense of “peoplehood” (Boyd Franklin, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

In closing, in everyday experience for an African American it’s an inescapable reality for people of color. We’ve strived for thousands of years to accomplish victory over the oppression that had us bound. Now today in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we still struggle for the same equal opportunities for everyone, color, race, religion, and culture. until we retain the same equal equality African American would always be a culture who fight for the rights of the people. African Americans represent approximately 13% of the U.S. population. On nearly all measures of education, employment, earnings, and psychological and physical health, they experience a standard of living much below their White counterparts. Individual, institutional, and cultural racism accounts for many of these disparities. The life experience of African Americans affects the manifestation of mental disorders and the therapeutic process. To work effectively with African American clients, therapists must be knowledgeable of their characteristics and strengths. Ethnic and racial identity, family structure, spiritual and religious values, education characteristics, and the experiences of

Black youths all suggest important dimensions to consider in counseling African Americans. An important aspect of cultural competency with African Americans is the recognition of protective factors and the strengths that have allowed them to survive in an intolerant society.

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