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BLACK MALE PERSPECTIVES OF COUNSELING ON A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

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Researchers have reported that it is often more difficult for minority students than White students to adjust academically and socially on predominantly White college campuses (Taylor, 1986). Previous research also suggests that there are differences in both perceptions of stressors and types of problems experienced by both Black and White students. Black students have been found to have greater concern regarding ethnic unity and trust, more academic difficulties, and greater financial concerns than their White counterparts (Pliner & Brown, 1985).

There is a growing number of overt racial incidents on predominantly White college campuses across America (Thomas, 1985). The Black student of today will have both emotional and psychological difficulties when attempting to adequately respond to such incidents and atmospheres. Some Black educators consider a predominantly White college or university setting a dangerous place for Black students who are struggling with their own identities. This study seeks to further investigate these areas of research.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND BLACK STUDENTS

Mental health services research indicates that mental health services on predominantly White college campuses are underused

by Black college students (Ponterotto, Anderson, & Grieger, 1986). The Black male has been identified as the least frequent consumer of these services. The therapeutic setting may be seen by many Black males as another extension of an antagonistic society. Because most counseling center staffs in these settings are predominantly or entirely White, Black students in general may stay away from college counseling centers because they do not expect to find Black counselors who would understand and identify with their problem (Ponterotto et al., 1986).

BLACK STUDENT PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS

According to Kirk (1986), although substantial information can be obtained during the clinical interview, other precipitating issues often also contribute to his mental and emotional discomfort.

PERCEIVED PERSONAL CONTROL

There is a prevalence of destructive behaviors among members of the Black community (Kirk, 1986). These behaviors are the ultimate results of poor mental health. Among them are stress, depression, homicide, and suicide.

Stress is a term often heard daily although there is no single agreed-upon definition for it. Cox and MacKay (1976) have developed a transactional model of stress that provides a comprehensive approach to conceptualizing stress. In this model, stress is emphasized as an individual perceptual phenomenon having its origin in psychological processes.

According to the model, stress may be said to arise when there is an imbalance between a perceived demand and the person's perception of his capability to meet the demand. The balance or imbalance is not between demand and actual capability but between perceived demand and perceived capability. Stress is also significantly related to the degree and amount of power one perceives he or she has within the societal context (Kirk, 1986). The relevance

of this point is that in understanding the world of Black students (Black males in particular), one must acknowledge that Black people have little power, real or perceived, within the American social structure (Kirk, 1986). This lack of empowerment results in poor physical health, poor mental health, and destructive behaviors in their community.

DEPRESSION

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one out of every five Americans, approximately a total of 40 million, has significant symptoms of depression at any given point in time. People below the age of 30 show a higher incidence of depression than do other age groups (Kirk, 1986). Depression not only affects the depressed person but it also has a significant affect on family members, friends, and others with whom the person may have contact. It contributes to loss of employment, broken marriages, troubled children, physical and verbal assaults, homicides, and suicides. Common to all types of depression is a psychic pain that torments the people suffering from it. To remove this pain, many people turn to alcohol and other nonprescriptive drugs. The relief received from alcohol or drugs is only temporary and inevitably the depression intensifies once the drug wears off (Kirk, 1986).

Studies have shown a correlation between Black people's sense of unempowerment and depression (Thomas, 1975). It is difficult to live in a society that supposedly stresses equal opportunity for all its citizens and have your efforts at equality blocked consistently at every level of society. Looking at the low percentage of Black students in a predominantly White college population who come to counseling, an alarming hypothesis is that many Black students are suffering from depression and go undiagnosed and untreated.

HOMICIDES AND SUICIDES

The fear of becoming a homicide victim, or of a loved one becoming a victim, is a grave concern that affects the attitudinal

perceptions of Black students. The national Center for Health Statistics reported in 1977 that there were 125.2 homicide deaths per 100,000 among Black males aged 25 to 44 years compared with about 14.2 per 100,000 among White males in the same age group (Kirk, 1986). Many of these victims are fathers and older brothers or relatives of Black college students, and even more frightening is that for many of these victims they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time (walking down the street, sitting in a car, standing on their front lawns, etc.). These hazards and fears have a tremendous emotional effect that increases the difficulty of Black students adjusting to a college environment. Equally as grim as Black homicides is the picture of Black suicides. Black males in the 20- to 30-year-old range commit suicide at a higher rate than the general population in that age-range category (Kirk, 1986). The components of depression and hopelessness are always present in these instances.

ATTITUDES OF BLACK YOUTH TOWARD SOCIETY

There is well-documented support for the idea that Black youth hold an external locus of control perception of the world (Dean, 1984). Many Black youth and young adults not only feel that they have little personal control in their environment, but Black unemployment and other sociological parameters keenly reinforce these perceptions. This perception is also reinforced in the community by older Black mentors and relatives whose goals and aspirations have repeatedly been sabotaged and denied. These older Blacks present a representative sample to many young Blacks of society's treatment of Black people. Seeing the crumbled hopes of those who have traveled the roads they too must one day travel shapes an expectation of society to embrace them with waiting arms, strip them of hope and a fair chance at self-actualization, and then discard them in the same manner as these community elders.

Black students are taught about racism and how to recognize racism, but many of them are not taught how to survive and cope with it (Thomas, 1985). Many enter adolescence and early adulthood having come from cultural cocoons that provide little oppor-

tunity to develop positive coping skills. They then emerge into the adult world confused about their identity, and having problems relating to Black and non-Black populations. Whatever the genesis of the Black student's problems, the fact remains that most Black students do not seek formal counseling services as a coping alternative.

UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTERS AND BLACK STUDENTS

Black students were found to use counseling center services less than White students, and Black males less than Black females (Kirk, 1986). The needs and problems of Black students on predominantly White college campuses were identified as establishing a meaningful personal identity, academic performance, interpersonal relationships, personal autonomy, sexual and aggressive feelings, long-range career plans, and multiple problems (Walter & Miles, 1982). As the area of concern becomes more personal and more threatening, the willingness to seek counseling diminishes for Black students.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Gaps still exist regarding the extent to which these findings can be generalized to specific Black populations. The existing literature also does not significantly increase our knowledge of Black male student perceptions of counseling services at predominantly White university settings. This study was designed to address this issue and related ones emphasized in the literature.

The research questions are:

1. On another predominantly White university campus, are Black male students' attitudes similar to those reported in other studies?
2. Does mandatory counseling affect the Black male's attitude toward counseling?
3. What other factors correlate with levels of counseling attitudes?

The hypotheses are that (a) Black males who voluntarily seek counseling have different attitudes toward counseling than those who otherwise attend counseling, and (b) Black males who volunteer for counseling will score higher in racial identity than those who otherwise attend counseling.

METHODOLOGY

SUBJECTS

Surveys were mailed to 100 Black male undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign campus. They were selected randomly using the Random Numbers Table. Twenty seven were returned by drop-off at a designated station.

INSTRUMENT

The instrument used for this study was compiled from items of three scales. These scales were the Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, the Multidimensional Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, and relevant items selected from the National Survey of Black Americans.

The scale to measure internal versus external control was developed by Rotter (1966) and designed to measure generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. Following several revisions—based on item-analysis, social desirability controls, and studies of discriminant validity—a 20-item, forced-choice questionnaire was produced by Rotter. The total score was computed simply by summing the number of external beliefs endorsed. The correlations presented are based on 200 male and 200 female Ohio State University elementary psychology students.

An internal consistency analysis (Kuder-Richardson) yielded $r = .70$ for both males and females. For two subgroups of this population, test-retest reliability coefficients were computed. After 1 month: males, $r = .60$ ($N = 30$); females, $r = .83$ ($N = 30$); combined,

$r = .72$ ($N = 60$). After 2 months: male, $r = -.49$ ($N = 63$); females, $r = -.61$ ($N = 54$); combined, $r = -.55$ ($N = 117$).

The Multidimensional I-E Scale was developed by Patricia Gurin and her colleagues (Gurin, Gurin, Lao, & Beattie, 1969) after finding that "internal control" is not a unitary dimension in the attitude structure of the African American college students. In the article, the multidimensional nature of personal control for African Americans is spelled out; thus this measurement technique was developed.

The multidimensional approach is based primarily on two key distinctions. The first is a distinction between self and others, and highlights the fact that a person may feel he is in control of his own life, yet believe that people in general are not. The second distinction is labeled *individual versus system blame*. The issue here is whether an African American person sees individual qualities or social system factors as the key determinants of his fate.

The sample on which the factor analysis was based contained 986 males and 1212 females, half of a random sample from 12 predominantly African American colleges in the United States.

In this study, it was hypothesized that the sense of personal control differentiates motivation and performance. The conclusion was drawn that because the opposing results from the two types of control measures cancel each other, the total score of the Rotter (1966) scales bears no relationship to these performance indicators. This distinction was emphasized in the meaning of external control by adding to the typical internal and external control items a set of questions that asked students to explain the status of African Americans in America. Did they follow an internal explanation by blaming the social position of African Americans on their personal inadequacies, or did they show themselves to be more externally oriented, and at the same time, sociologically more sophisticated by stressing the importance of racial and social discrimination? The results did suggest that system blame did have such a relevance.

Rotter's (1966) study conceived of the "internal" personality as confident, competent, innovative, and so forth. The Gurin et al. (1969) study shows that for African Americans living in America, this is a faulty assumption. In their case, accepting blame for their

relatively poor socioeconomic status would imply the opposite of competence.

The National Survey of Black Americans was developed by the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (Jackson, 1991). Questionnaires were sent to a random number of African American people in the United States to get their perception of their racial identity attitudes. Items from this survey were included to comprise the racial identity attitude dimension of the responses. Included in the instrument packet was a demographic sheet as well as a consent form and a statement of the confidential nature of this study.

PROCEDURE

The questionnaires were mailed to all African American males on a list of African American male students in a special transition program for freshmen and sophomores, and those who were involved in other African American social groups (e.g., fraternities, clubs) or school organizations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

RESULTS

Of the 100 questionnaires mailed, a total of 26 instruments were returned: 11.5% of the subjects were freshmen, 34.6% were sophomores, 23.1% were juniors, and 30.8% were seniors. There were 14 subjects classified as volunteers and 12 classified as nonvolunteers.

The four variables analyzed were Attitude Toward Education, Coping and Help-Seeking, Attitudes Toward Counseling, and Racial Identity.

The reliability analyses for the Attitudes Toward Education Scale showed correlations between items that required 9 out of the total 34 items to be thrown out. The coefficient alpha was .83 ($p > .05$). This resulted in a scale of 25 items with an internal consistency reliability alpha coefficient of .84.

Regarding the Coping and Help-Seeking Scale, a 27-item scale, the reported coefficient alpha was .69 ($p > .05$). The Attitude Toward Counseling Scale of 8 items computed a coefficient alpha of .84 ($p > .05$). The Racial Identity Scale composed of 17 items yielded an coefficient alpha of .61 ($p > .05$).

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed for the four scales with the correlation between the Attitudes Toward Counseling Scale and Racial Identity yielding a coefficient alpha of .20 ($p > .05$). Items of the Attitude Toward Counseling Scale were correlated with items for each of the three scales to see whether strong relationships existed among any items.

T tests were then applied to determine differences in means between volunteer and nonvolunteer groups on the four scales. These results are shown in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

There were no significant differences between the responses of the subjects identified as volunteers and nonvolunteers. On the surface this would indicate that they share similar attitudes toward education, counseling, coping behavior, and in their level of racial identity. These results summon further research to determine among African American males what factors contribute to one seeking counseling voluntarily for certain concerns.

There were a number of possible reasons why the instrument did not yield more significant results. One plausible problem with the survey could be the way in which the survey was returned. Using the drop-off method, a certain type of conscientious individual or individuals may have been the ones to return the questionnaire. Given this possibility, there may not have been two really heterogeneous groups of respondents. There may have been only one homogeneous group, because all of them seemed pretty consistent and high in the scores of attitudes about education. This could possibly indicate that the participants were all conscientious, good problem solvers, and so forth.

Another problem with the survey that may have contributed to the low level of significant results would be low sample size. There may not have been enough subjects to pick up significant differences. Although 100 surveys were mailed to the pool of subjects, only 26 were returned. A better method of delivering surveys could have been employed. A better return rate may have been achieved had the respondents been given a stamped envelope with which to respond. Sample size could also have been improved had the respondents had a setting where they could come and complete the instruments in one sitting and turn them in to the researcher.

A third problem with the sample could be lost items for some of the scale. The survey contained 94 items and many respondents did not complete the entire questionnaire. There may have been too many items that discouraged many of the participants to feel compelled to complete each section. The respondents may have tired while answering the items and began to randomly answer the items instead of conscientiously answering the items.

A fourth problem with the sample size could be the attitude African American males on this campus may have about counseling, which could contribute to their unwillingness to disclose any personal information. A distrust of the milieu and previous negative experiences could contribute to their guardedness or their indiscriminate attitude in the subject matter of the study.

PROBLEMS WITH SCALES

One problem with using items from Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Locus of Control Scale may have been the population to whom it was originally given. The population was not predominantly African American, and this could possibly invalidate its attempt to measure African American students' perceptions of control. Another problem with this particular scale could be the fact that more evidence is needed in regarding its relation to other self-concept measures, according to Rotter. This particular scale does not effectively measure internal-external locus of control with special populations; therefore the effectiveness of this scale in relation to this study could possibly not be as valid as was believed

TABLE 1
Differences in Means Between Volunteers and Nonvolunteer Groups

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>T Value</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>2-tailed Probability</i>
Attitude Toward Education							
Group 1	14	3.7	.47	.13	-.19	24	.83
Group 2	12	3.8	.44	.13			
Coping Behavior							
Group 1	14	2.6	.60	.17	-.11	24	.92
Group 2	12	2.6	.49				
Attitude Toward Counseling							
Group 1	14	2.7	1.06	.28	.12	23	.91
Group 2	11	2.6	1.27	.38			
Racial Identity							
Group 1	14	2.9	.33	.10	-.88	24	.39
Group 2	12	3.0	.33				

when constructing the instrument. Although this problem would seemingly have been alleviated by using items from the Multidimensional I-E Scale, constructed for this very reason, some items from Rotter's I-E Scale were used nonetheless to test this phenomenon.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

There seemed to be a strong correlation between the degree of the individual's problem and positive attitudes toward counseling in reviewing the scales of coping and help-seeking and the correlated items in the Attitude Toward Counseling Scale. More research can be directed at the types and degrees of problems Black males face in these settings and the relationship toward positive attitudes toward counseling. There also seemed to be a positive correlation between high external control with education and positive attitudes about counseling. This may be attributed only to these particular items used in this instrument, but further research can lead to clarification of this relationship if one exists.

The results of this study also point to a need to further develop instruments normed on African American students to assess internal-external locus of control. Further research should also focus on

what concerns precipitate African American males seeking counseling from formal helping settings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING CENTER SERVICES

Implications for future service to this population are present given the results from this study. Counseling centers on predominantly White college/university campuses can look at informal networks in place for Black males and possibly collaborate with the existing support resources in working toward alleviating the emotional and psychological difficulties Black males encounter in responding to destructive elements inherent in predominantly White institutional atmospheres (i.e., racism). Counseling centers in these settings can also develop and maintain effective, collaborative programs with high school counselors, teachers, and principals that feed their institutions with Black male students to assess the needs of their Black male populations at present, and prospective needs they may have upon entering the college environment. These centers can also develop culture-sensitive outreach programs for Black male high school students that will introduce to them a concerned and supportive arm of the university and as well as gather first-hand information on the students' perceptions of their needs. This outreach programming also provides information to the students on the current and developing services provided by their centers and how these services can meet their needs. Outreach programming committees can also take the information revealed through these assessments and convert them into viable, implemented intervention strategies.

To meet the needs of the Black male, counseling centers must also demonstrate a willingness to act as advocates for Black males students in their relations to other agencies and schools on the campus. Counseling centers must also demonstrate a willingness to establish ongoing support groups for Black males, at the time and setting of their choice, to allow them to verbalize their frustrations and concerns as well as work on intervention strategies they

may prefer to those presently being offered by formal institutional agencies or organizations. Another intervention technique would involve a willingness for counselors to do active counseling extending beyond the counseling center setting to areas of comfort for Black male students (e.g., rooms in Black cultural centers, student unions) to facilitate their receipt of counseling center services.

Planned follow-up group sessions by these counseling professionals with Black males identified through assessment techniques and outreach programming should be implemented regularly to assess if identified needs are being met by the intervention strategies developed. These sessions can also assess whether the student attitudes toward counseling are becoming more or less favorable.

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