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**Ethnopsychology: A Breakdown in Communication**

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## Ethnopsychotherapy: A Breakdown in Communication

Blacks are one of the most vulnerable and victimized groups in contemporary American society. They have been mislabeled and miseducated by the schools, mishandled by the juvenile justice system, mistreated by mental health agencies, and neglected by social welfare bureaucracy until very recently. Their plight has been minimized by health care professionals and ignored by the policy makers, so that they have been labeled as 'endangered species' and members of a growing underclass.  
(Children of Color, 179)

From the moment a client settles himself in the chair for the first time, the therapist takes a deep breath knowing that what is about to occur is the beginning of a new relationship. This relationship will have moments of special closeness and others of great hardships. The client will, at times, worship the therapist, scorn him, ignore him, play with him, and want to devour him. Regardless of what is going on in the therapist's own world-sickness, births, deaths, joys, and disappointments, the therapist must be there for the client, always waiting.

Therefore, communication is the cornerstone on which every therapy relationship is built. Without a strong attachment, therapy simply cannot continue. At every level communication steps in to impede or encourage the therapeutic process. The relationship becomes an even larger focal point when the client is an African-American and a White therapist. In this paper, I intend to focus on biracial therapy. It will enable the reader to understand the psychology of an African-American client better. This paper will challenge the reader to become more aware of African-American communication styles and language when she or he is placed in a biracial relationship. Finally, I will explore psychological intervention and the necessity of cultural

knowledge and dialogic listening. Although this paper explores many psychological issues, its primary premise is to understand better how white therapists and African-American clients communicate.

I will begin this section with a look at African-American's cultural language beginning with slavery, exploring the use of language and how it influences the therapy relationship. Religion is what unites in many African-American families. Religious beliefs can be a key factor in the breakdown of communication in Ethnopsychotherapy relationships. Finally, I will explore psychological intervention and the necessity of cultural knowledge and dialogic listening. Without hesitation, I believe biracial therapy relationships are a unique conundrum. We must explore and research this unique relationship to explore the changing needs of our society. It is imperative that we observe all communicating and listening concepts of biracial therapy situations for a healthy relationship and positive treatment outcomes.

We must understand, many African-Americans are hesitant about many things White America offers. Joseph White and Thomas Parham writes "However the great distress African-Americans feel, they resist asking White people for help, and having asked for help, they resist being influenced by the professional White therapist they have employed to help them."

(The Psychology of Blacks: An African-American Experience, 1984-1990)

Therefore, many African-Americans avoid psychotherapy and ancestral coping styles are placed instead (i.e., religion). African slaves believed ancestral spirits would protect them from hurt, harm, and danger. However, they understood that wherever one goes there is trouble and strife. In this belief only the creator (God) could remove them from tragedy.

(Turning Corners: The Psychology of African-Americans, 263) Sadly, African-Americans fear

the science of psychology. In fact, many believe that the therapist has demons that drive the mental health process of disease. In all, most feel a spiritual fear regarding a white therapist and their ability to seek what the client holds most important; their thoughts. This can lead to the belief that the therapist has God-like interpretations when he or she hits the mark. Clearly, the goal of all psychotherapy is to help the client get in touch with their hidden or unconscious processes.

“African-American’s regard white counselors as less able to help in problem situations such as general anxiety, shyness, inferiority feelings, and dating difficulties,”

(Culture and Psychology, 16). Assuredly, they pass beliefs like this from generation to generation. Before we look at the therapy relationship, we must first attempt to understand why they call this culture an, “endangered species and members of a growing underclass.”

(Children of Color, 127) The first section of this paper will look at language and communication.

## COMMUNICATION

Communication means, “the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs.”(The Lost Art of Listening, 86) It is essential that communication is a utensil for psychotherapy. We should understand it before we enter the domain of biracial therapy relationships. Communication must have a sender, receiver and message. It is the message that we often misinterpret. Therefore, when a therapist begins working with an African-American, they must send clear messages or the therapy can fail. Nonverbal communication is equally important for a therapist’s dress, gestures, and timeliness is likely to be observed as well.

In therapy, dialogic listening is important in the communication of the psychotherapy.

Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies, defines dialogic as,

“property of all signification, that of being structured as dialogue.” This means that every word uttered in therapy can be perceived as structured dialogue. However, the emphasis is placed on the speaker's word or utterance. This is important for all therapy, but, imperative in the biracial therapy. For instance, if the burden is placed on the client's dialogue alone, it may not contain sufficient evidence for a full conceptualization for the therapist to have a successful dialogue. Significance, becomes the primary issue for the therapist. Believing that every dialogue in biracial therapy is successful is remiss. The opposite is most true. Communication cross-cultural has multi-accentuality. This means that the exchange can have more than one meaning. If the therapist has one meaning and the client, another meaning, we have not had a successful dialogic communication. A breakdown in therapy and communication has occurred. Proper communication and comprehension of the same dialogical utterances are imperative for biracial therapy.

Appropriate dialogic listening places emphasis on the message, in which, the client is trying to convey to the therapist. It is important for the therapist to listen to not only what is uttered but how it is uttered and under what circumstances the utterance was voiced. This sounds like a formidable task, but, it is essential for successful communication. Dialogic listening, if done successfully, conveys awareness of the client. According to Relationships and Strategies in the Helping Profession:

Awareness refers to the identification of verbal and nonverbal cues (or bits of information) being conveyed by the client and the therapist. This suggests a dual

perspective, simultaneous awareness of self, and awareness of the other. Ideally, as therapists we are aware of 1) cues from the client, 2) our reaction to those cues, 3) the cues we give to the client, and, 4) their reaction to our cues. Remembering it however is crucial, that our awareness of cues is distinctly different from our interpretation of cues. (1994)

Dialogic listening is the focus of awareness and interpretation. If the therapist is not attuned to the client, he or she may take it as a cultural rejection. Some may believe the therapist is prejudice and resist further communication with the therapist.

The message is through understanding how an African-American perceives a white therapist's feedback. The goal of the therapist is to convey, to the client, that they are listening and interested in what the client has to say. Feeling listened to, most African-Americans, are willing to clarify and help the therapist in understanding their particular plight. Proper communication requires three skills of the feedback technique. The feedback must come, however, with several other key factors that will have further justification later in this paper. First, giving feedback entails ensuring it is given with respect and agility. Secondly, giving improper feedback to clients can result in the whole relationship being damaged. Damaged relationships most often occur when the feedback given is off the mark, damaging to the client's self-esteem and seems culturally racists. Third, giving feedback that will result in heightening the client's awareness of his behavior and meaning is imperative for any helper.

Feedback has three elements. They are specificity, empathy, and inquiry. Every helper must give feedback that is specific and descriptive. Specificity allows informational control that will result in mutual understanding. Secondly, we must give feedback with empathy. Empathy

is the communication and initial understanding of what the client is experiencing. It can also mean the therapist allows his or herself to look at life through the eyes of the client. Essentially, seeing the world with double vision. The plight of the client and the trained objective therapist become one. If the client feels misunderstood, she may become hostile or defensive. Empathy allows the client to see the helper as honest and open. Finally, inquiry is the third element to effective feedback. Inquiry allows the helper to gather data. This, in turn will allow the helper to form hypotheses and to ask goal-driven questions. Being aware of statements holding the tag of feedback is important for the Ethnopsychotherapist.

Training techniques on feedback is useful. However, knowing that we should give feedback focusing on positive strengths and not negative ones are crucial for every therapist. Feedback allows the helper to adjust the relationships that restore previous equilibrium or by maintaining it. If feedback is done correctly, the counseling relationship becomes productive and positive. It can enhance the clients' response to confrontation and help them (if they do not already) take it without defensiveness. In essence, feedback structures, in a way, the future. Feedback in relation to counseling is the African-American client who comes in with dysfunctional coping styles. The counselor after observing his coping style can give feedback on his behavior and heighten his awareness to a more appropriate way of dealing with issues. In the article, "Feedback is a Two-Way Street," the authors claim

Most people want some type of feedback about how they are doing. However, it must be sensitive to ethnic diversity in psychotherapy. It offers guidance for continued success or discontinued behavior. The goal is to empower the client and feedback is an outstanding way to do it. Feedback is more than useful. It is essential. Sometimes the type of



relationship can be considered a barrier to feedback. The relationship between the two can be a perceived balance of power (Lawrence et al., 1995)

This information is especially useful for all counseling relationships. Feedback in therapy should use the three criteria described above. Feedback can be a resourceful guide to implementing treatment modalities and understanding the client's situation. I would go further and say proper feedback is the siamese twin of empathy. Having appropriate feedback given at appropriate times is essential in the helping relationship.

## **LANGUAGE**

Language often transmits culture. If the interventions are not available in the appropriate language, the treatment may be difficult or impossible to deliver. Ethnic minorities often relate language to the expression of emotional experiences and these expressions should be considered in the treatment process. Culturally sensitive language may help in ensuring that they receive the intervention as intended. The language of intervention also includes discussion of racial issues (in non-threatening ways). The Ethnopsychotherapists should also welcome the client to a comfortable and familiar environment. The use of language intervention reduces resistance, increases motivation, and strengthens the communication between client and therapist.

Often, language is used to make several distinctions, according to John Beatty's article, "Language and Communication." Beatty argues, "there is a distinction between language and speech. Speech is what people actually say, whereas language is the embodiment of the rules for what they say." (Cross-Cultural Topics in Psychology, Social Psychology, 41) In the context of therapy, communication of language may be impaired. Therapist should find a mutual level of understanding language that will allow for growth in the relationship. Without mutual

language, therapy is impossible. According to Beatty,

Language and communication can be seen as two areas of human behavior that vary dramatically from culture to culture. Without this core, from one language to another would be virtually impossible. In effect, by careful analysis of cross-cultural communication, it becomes possible to understand how individuals are able to communicate interculturally. All human languages and cultures seem to share a certain amount of commonality. Specific languages and cultures variations on this common core, allowing for all cultures to be simultaneously unique yet the same (p. 43).

## **HISTORY**

Now, we will journey into the history of the African-American. It is essential that we begin where the culture started to understand where the culture is today. Slavery built the southern part of the United States. They were building a culture and then a community from a litany of different African tribes. These tribes had differing languages. However, as the slaves began forming families, their tribal language became a union of several languages. An example is Swahili. This paper will not detail the horrendous experiences they had or their meager existence. However, it is essential that we understand that slavery created a group of people with no foundation of language to begin with. Ethnopsychotherapists should understand that some African-American's still have not learned the English language and are still lacking in language. In the therapy relationship, it is essential that the white therapist understand many older African-American clients have below a 4<sup>th</sup> grade educational language (American Slavery: American Freedom, 63).

Slaves learned English later but it was unmistakably mixed with their tribal language and was somewhat hard to understand. It is no secret that slaves had a code language. Interestingly, this language was in the form of song, folktale, sermon, or dance. The slaves created an awesome way of communication amongst themselves. Harriet Tubman, Moses, of the underground Rail Road, heard her lyrics into the dark nights, "Go down Moses, go down." Another song, "Wade in the water, Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water." American Slavery: American Freedom, 98). Oftentimes freedom was synonymous with heaven. These synonyms have become an establishment in the present African-American community.

Another example of African-American language communication is through the use of signifying. Signifying is the use of language to suggest what a person is saying. This is important for therapists. Signifying is intentionally misleading. The reasons for this type of communication are (1) The person who signifies may be wrong and (2) it may cause some embarrassment (Black Children, 176). This form of communication has been a key to understanding African-Americans. It has a historically sound basis. Ethnopsychotherapists should always be aware that these clients may hint their feelings and behaviors. White and Parham assert that when an African-American is angered or mistreated, they are forthright. As Slaves they were unable to react lest they would be beaten or sold from their families. In point, the slaves addressed their owners differently than their family and community. This paradoxical communication is evident today in our society. "African-Americans often change the way they speak dependent on whom he/she are speaking with." (Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria, 212) In the therapy relationship, if the therapist is not aware of this sensitivity, the relationship can remain on a superficial basis for many months and possible

termination of the therapy as the end result.

Female slaves spoke and excelled in various manifestations of verbal rituals. A black woman's assertive voice is forefront in the tradition of African-American oral tradition. This hierarchy gives the reader crucial concerns about male African-Americans. Zora Neale Hurston, a celebrated African-American cultural anthropologist, contends, "black women are the real and essential storytellers of black history. These women possess an honesty and clarity of expression that produces truth and stability," (I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . ., 118). To Zora, assertiveness is crucial to a black woman's survival. This is because the extensive role of the black woman requires them to have a communication style that demands respect. Zora also felt that understanding oral traditions are a way of life for black women and their work. White et al., show, "African-Americans are, in general, able to squeeze out a song, story, or sermon from a lyrical-like, near tragic situation in their lives." (p 83) The coping strategy within the black society is depicted with concision by White et al.: "The ability to override thought from feeling has been a utensil well used in this population." (p. 97) Numerous techniques are used to help African-American society reestablish themselves in harmony with both spiritual and natural forces. Notwithstanding, African-Americans use song, story, or folk tale. It shows certain coping strategies are embedded within religion in this culture.

## **FAMILY**

Family was very important for slaves and for building this cultural community. Marriages were prohibited. "Slave codes did not provide for legal slave marriages, for that would have contradicted the master's freedom to dispose of his property as he saw fit" (Out of Many . . ., p. 94). Despite and in spite of these unfair laws, the slaves married when the female

became pregnant. Common throughout the South was the postnuptial ritual in which the couple jumped over the broomstick together, declaring their relationship to the slave community. This also signified a custom that remained intact from Africa. Interestingly, this age-old tradition is still practiced today.

Today, the importance of family remains intact. This is widely seen with young African-Americans having children and those children being reared by their mother. It is not uncommon for three or four generations to live under one roof. We must also understand extended family has higher importance in the African-American community. According to, Sadye M.L. Logan, Edith M. Freeman and Ruth G. McRoy in their book, Social Work Practice With Black Families: A Culturally Specific Perspective,

The slave's survival depended in large part on the training and sustenance provided in the slave quarters. Slave parents provided their children with love and affection, helped them to understand their situation and how to avoid punishment by the master, and taught them to cooperate with other blacks. This early socialization served to bolster the child's self-esteem by providing love, positive feedback, and acceptance as a valid person (p. 52).

This quote epitomizes the worth of family values. This form of child-rearing is still practiced today. African-Americans place great emphasis on the female. This is in contrast with White Americans who are predominately patriarchal in their culture. African-Americans have psychologically a strong culture. Their strengths are strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong achievement orientation and a religious orientation have helped the black to survive. Logan et al., also cites "These factors have been responsible for

increasing the number of Blacks who have not experienced teen pregnancies, welfare dependency, children in foster care, and involvement in criminal and gang activities.”(p.66)

The Ethnopsychologist should question the client about their family life style. She should remain on alert when listening to the client explain family dynamics. This is often because many African-American's tend to have large families and even larger networks of support and friendship. Often, these are the key reasons some African-Americans choose to not enter psychotherapy. The network of support is, in a sense, paratherapist. However, we must not disregard that the communication between family and loved ones starkly differs that of a white psychotherapist. This, in my opinion, is where the break down in communication occurs in some therapy relationships. It is very hard for some African-American to be vulnerable and open with a White person.

## **RELIGION**

Religion is also a major part of the African-American foundation. I understand from Ms. Hurston claims, “Distinctive patterns in music and dance, religion, and oral tradition illustrate the resilience of the human spirit under bondage as well as the successful struggle of African-Americans to create a spiritually sustaining culture of their own” (p. 95). Therefore, when a therapist deals with a highly religious African-American, she should most understand most religions are fundamental. Their religion is to them what sign language is to a deaf person. Therefore, we can understand Bradd Shore in his book Culture in Mind,

In the Black community the church is often the central focus of social and civic activity. Most blacks are Protestant and many participate in Fundamentalist denominations which stresses ascetism, tithing, and piety. Even if Black families are not currently involved in

a particular religion, their religious heritage shape their beliefs in and values. Their views on marital relationships and divorce, abortion, adoption, child-rearing and so on are all church oriented (p. 209).

In a standardized clinical interview, “with 148 subjects 80% of the population used religion as the answer to adversity, 46% used religion to cope with depression” ( p. 217). Historically, the most crucial areas of religion deal with death and death rituals. According to Faragher et al.,

African-Americans often decorated graves with shells and pottery, an old African custom. African-Americans generally believed that the spirits of their dead would return to Africa. ‘Some destroy themselves (commit suicide) through despair and from a persuasion they fondly entertain, that after death they will return to their beloved friends and native country,’ wrote one South Carolinian” (Out of Many..., 95).

It is obvious, slavery steps into the therapeutic relationship unseen, yet it is a dominant presence. Slaves began a way of communication that would follow African-Americans through many ordeals and types of oppression. The Ethnopsychotherapist must understand the deep relationship of present day and that of past slaves. This will help gain rapport and trust.

Religion and family will be presented continuously in biracial therapy. The therapist will soon learn the value and the relative non-existent value. However, before observations are given to the client, the therapist must ensure he can handle it. Thus, the importance of proper communication, feedback, and language. According to Dr. Patricia Wassissico, “The slightest breach of confidentiality can be magnified into a major betrayal . . . that is why you must study each relationship that you have intensely or you will lose your client. An offhand remark or thoughtless joke can cause pain or confusion to the client, but alertness to the vagaries of the

relationship will reduce the chances of such things from occurring. (Personal interview).

## **COMMUNICATING PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Psychotherapy communicates empathy. Empathy transmits unconditional positive regard, a non-judgmental attitude, and basic concern for all clients. It has more value when working with African-Americans. According to Logan et al., "Therapy with the Black client should make use of empathy to assert genuine concern. Black clients tend to respond to the genuineness of the therapist more so than her educational level or positive attitude" (p. 38). African-Americans are seemingly more perceptive to what isn't said. Therefore, genuine empathy can make room for a positive therapy relationship.

Empathy can be measured by the use of open and closed questions. Open questions are used for explanations and eliciting general data. Closed questions are used to get concrete answers. They are generally "yes" or "no" in nature. Immediacy is the attention to how the therapist listens. For instance, if the client is talking about having a hard time concentrating, the therapist should follow it immediately with some communication of understanding and validation regarding poor concentrating. This is where the concept of immediacy is explored. Immediacy in biracial therapy can be the building blocks of open communication between client and therapist.

Clarification is also important. In the relationship clarification allows for effective communication to ensure the therapist is on the same page as the client. This can open the door for mutually sound therapeutic processes. The process of reflection has two steps. First, the reflection of content. According to Dr. E. Ullery, "this allows the therapist to parrot back to the client what he understood the client to say." Secondly, reflection of meaning. This part of



reflection is most crucial form of communication in biracial therapy. Reflection of meaning forces the therapist to get in the brain of the client and understand what he is implying. We can obtain this by using the skill of empathy as earlier discussed. This can be difficult and, at times, impossible for the therapist. The relationship hinges on her ability to accurately reflect what an African-American is meaning. This is near to impossible for an African-American therapist to do with a client. However, in a biracial therapy situation these reflections must communicate the client's problem. The use of silence is also used in the communication of empathy. Silence allows the client to gather thoughts. It allows the therapist to make overall observations that can go unnoticed when he is paying attention to the clients words. Finally, the use of confrontation as an effective communication of empathy. Confrontation by itself can cause irreplaceable damage to therapy relationships. However, if the therapist has honed this skill, she can be successful in challenging the African-American client. However, confronting could mean that the client will become angry and terminate therapy. It is through, questions, immediacy, clarifications, reflections of content and meaning, silence, and finally confrontation that empathy is communicated to the client.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL THEMES**

Self-concept in an African-American is mostly fragmented and profoundly negative. However, the research suggests a "multiple reference point." African-Americans have available to them and make use of different reference groups. According to Bell Hooks, author of Sisters of the Yam: black women and self-recovery writes:

Self-concept is a multifaceted sense that one has about what one is. It is a theory about self. People try by their actions to keep self-esteem at a relatively positive level. Apart

from the problems of measurement of self-esteem in general, and among minority persons in particular, the contradictions in the literature on self-esteem of Afro-Americans reflect the fact that self-concept is multi-faceted. Persons have available to themselves a variety of vantage points which they use to conceptualize themselves and their place in the world at any given moment (p.30).

African Americans have six recurrent themes that are identified in dialogic communication. They are emotional vitality, realness, resilience, interrelatedness, the value of direct experience, and distrust and deception. These themes symbolize affective, cognitive, and cultural flavor of most African-Americans. Therefore, let us take a closer look at these themes.

White et al., cites :

There is a sense of aliveness, animation, emotional vitality, and openness to feelings expressed in the language. To capture and hold the attention of the listener, the speaker is expected to make words come alive, to use ear-filling phrases that stir the imagination with heavy personification that stir the imagination with heavy reliance on tonal rhymes, symbolism, figures of speech, and personification. (p. 56)

African-American language is life-affirming; despair, apathy, and downtroddenness are rejected. Feelings are not suppressed, but freely shared with others.

The message regarding realness can be seen in Gospel music and the Blues Singers. In the article, "The Ethos of the Blues," Leon Neal writes:

Life does not play with Black folks. There are dues to be paid, nobody gets away with it. Disappointments, setbacks, tragedy and defeat are inevitable. The first step of learning to survive is to see life exactly as it is, without deception. The goal of the Black person is

to 'keep on, keepin' on.'" (p.46)

In this theme, true psychological growth and emotional maturity cannot be completed until the person has paid his or her dues by overcoming hardship, defeat, sorrow and grief. "The African-American who has come through a major storm is no longer afraid and his or her soul may look back in wonder how they made it over the troubled sea of life." (Baldwin, 1963) He or she has a healthy respect for life, is not afraid to be real, authentic, and genuine. He or she is aware of their particular vulnerabilities. Finally, the African-American has the capacity to be compassionate and empathic with someone else's struggle.

In the book, Blues People: Negro Music in White America, by Leroy Jones cite:

The picture of human existence by blues and gospel artist go beyond oppressing, hardship, and struggle. There is more to life than unrequited love. On the other side of the spectrum to balance the emotional and psychological spectrum are the renewal experiences of sensuousness, joy, and laughter. The trouble will pass, the blues won't last always, and freedom will emerge on some bright sunny day. The consciousness of pain, sorrow, and hurt in blues and gospel music is not accompanied by feelings of guilt, shame, and self-rejection. It is pure sadness that can be differentiated from the clinical syndrome of depression where guilt, shame, and self-debasement make it easier to draw upon the revitalization powers of sensuousness, joy, and laughter. (p. 197)

This quote states clearly the process of resilience in the African-American client. One can build a foundation this particular theme speaks of strength and psychological goal.

Interdependence, interrelatedness, connectedness, and synthesis is the next theme.

According to Wade Nobles, "the spoken word in the Black community is the pervasive force that

connects human experience.” (p. 23) In African-American strength the words come alive through colorful poetic sketches that arouse feelings. Though the spoken word linkages are established across time and space, transmitting the African-American heritage through generations. In the book, Ebonics, the True Language of Black Folks, by Gregory Holt cites:

The language of soul folks is characterized by the interrelatedness of speaker and listener. The act of speaking is a dramatic presentation of one's personhood to those who share a background of similar acculturation. The listener acts as an echo chamber, repeating, cosigning, validating, and affirming the message of the speaker with 'amens,' 'right-ons,' 'yes-sirs.' During this call-response dialogue, the speaker and listener are joined together in a common psycholinguistic space. (p. 156)

The speaker uses visual symbols to draw a picture of what is occurring. The intellectual meaning is carried by implying or creating a psychoaffective or cognitive-affective synthesis. The oral tradition is an integral part of African-American identity. The emotional, psychological, and cultural tone of African-American ethos. Orlando Taylor writes, "Ethos is an underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a group or society." (p. 48) Competence in understanding and interpreting the African-American world view by the therapist is crucial in biracial therapy.

Direct experience has value in the psychological theme of some African-Americans. In Ellis Smith's article, "Counseling Blacks: A Group Approach," he cites

There is no substitute in the Black ethos for the actual experiences gained in the course of living. The natural facts, eternal truths, wisdom of the ages, and basic precepts of survival emerge from the experiences of life: 'you cannot lie to life.' In interpersonal

relationships, matters of race and the affairs of nations, 'the truth will out' no lie can last for long. The slaves kept the faith in the belief that freedom was just a matter of time, the experience of captivity would pass because slavery was against the laws of God and humanity. The collective lessons of experience are carried forward from one generation to the next by the oral tradition.

Experience is often cherished in this culture. This allows the client to learn from experiences and it passes it down a legacy for generations to come. In essence, the mistakes of a mother can be learned from and diverted for the future children and their children.

Distrust and deception is the last psychological theme that will be discussed. In view of the distrust African-Americans have developed in their dealings with many White people, it should come as no surprise that some African-American have been less than honest, even somewhat deceptive, when it comes to sharing what's really on their minds with a portion of White people, as can be seen in the following statement from an old slave song:

*Got one mind for white folk to see  
Nother for what I know is me  
He don't know don't know what's on my mind. (Psychology of Blacks, 80)*

According to Richard Wright in his book, American Hunger, cites:

The use of common language with culturally different semantics enables Blacks to conceal what they mean from White folks while still maintaining a high level of clarity in their communications. Words, phrases, and statements that are taken to mean one thing when interpreted from a Euro-American frame of reference can mean something entirely different when translated through an Afro-American ethnotropic filter. (p. 119)

These psychological themes are imperative for a White therapist to fully understand the depth of

a people who wage war with life daily. Many African-Americans have a psychological strength that may be hard to find in a biracial therapy. Interracial therapy, if used correctly, can build a therapeutic relationship that crosses all boundaries. The African-American culture is filled with dynamic coping skills and devastating tragedies. However, through the psychological themes one can grasp the poignancy of this culture.

In conclusion, racial differences can pose a formidable challenge to the therapist. The African-American therapist and White therapist often approach each other with little understanding of each other's social realities and with unfounded assumptions and unrealistic expectations. Sadly, it is rarely recognized how the racial breakdown will affect the therapy. The quality of their interaction and fruitfulness of their purpose depends, primarily, on their ability to develop and invest in a trusting, open relationship. This can be accomplished by understanding African-American cultural taboos, mores, and values. Through dialogic listening and mutual language the therapy has room for growth. Having a therapist that understand the history and psychological themes are important indicators in assuming the outcome of the relationship. Biracial therapy is successful when there is mutual respect for the client and the therapist.

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