ED 462 666   CG 031 612

AUTHOR   Williams-Clay, LaTasha K.; West-Olatunji, Cirecie A.;
                Cooley, Susan R.
TITLE   Keeping the Story Alive: Narrative in the African-American
                Church and Community.
PUB DATE   2001-03-00
NOTE   10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American
                Counseling Association (San Antonio, TX, March 15-20, 2001).
PUB TYPE   Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Black History; *Blacks; Counseling; Counseling Objectives;
                *Counseling Techniques; Cultural Background; Cultural
                Traits; *Ethnography; Literature Reviews; *Personal
                Narratives; Resilience (Personality); Therapy
IDENTIFIERS   *African Americans; Multicultural Counseling; *Narrative
                Therapy; Oppression

ABSTRACT
        Narratives exist within the African cultural ethos then and
now in a variety of contexts. For African Americans, one function of the
narrative has been the therapeutic effect of ameliorating oppression. Current
literature on narrative therapy provides a foundation for discussing the
healing power of narratives in the African American community. Narrative
interventions such as the Story Circle exercise are considered
culture-centered because of its intentional use of African-based mores (e.g.,
emphasis on community, intergenerational focus, and circularity). Counselors
considering culture-centered narratives for work with African American
clients need to consider the effective forms of resilience within the African
American community. This will allow them to replicate and generalize these
forms of resilience within the counseling session. (Author)

Running head: NARRATIVE THERAPY

Keeping the story alive: Narrative in the African-American

Church and Community

LaTasha K. Williams-Clay

Xavier University of Louisiana

Cirecie A. West-Olatunji

Xavier University of Louisiana

Susan R. Cooley

Pastoral Counseling Center

Presented at the American Counseling Association conference 2001

San Antonio, TX

2

Abstract

Narratives exist within the African cultural ethos then and now in a variety of contexts. For African Americans, one function of the narratives has been the therapeutic effect of ameliorating oppression. Current literature on narrative therapy provides a foundation for discussing the healing power of narratives in the African American community(Ani, 1994).

Narrative interventions such as the Story Circle exercise are considered culture-centered because of its intentional use of African-based mores (e.g., emphasis on community, intergenerational focus, and circularity).

Counselors considering culture-centered narratives for work with African American clients need to consider the effective forms of resilience within the African American community. This will allow them to replicate and generalize these forms of resilience within the counseling session.

Keeping the story alive: Narrative in the African-American

Church and Community

Storytelling, as a form of narrative, has been exemplified

within the African American culture historically as well as in a

contemporary context. Narrative has not only been a part of the

African and African-American culture, but within mainstream

society as well(White & Epston, 1990). As a cultural group,

African Americans have used storytelling to transcend the many

documented horrors endured during slavery. Ani (1994) refers to

the horrible trauma and torture of slavery experienced by

Africans in the diaspora as the "maafa." This historical trauma

is discussed within the framework of African-American

resilience; how Africans in the Americas have endured,

prevailed, and at times mastered their oppressive environment.

Slave and ex-slave narratives are important not only for

what they tell us about African-American history and literature,

but also because they reveal to society and the world the

complexities of the dialogue that transpires between mainstream

(i.e., middle-class, white America) and Black America (Ani,

1994). The dialogue is implicit in that it evokes spirit,

meaning and richness that may not be understood by all people.

For instance, songs sung by slaves in the fields were meant for

each other and not for slave-owners to understand but became a

coded language among enslaved Africans. This is where slave narratives began. Thus, the birth of slave narratives evolved from the social reality and historical imperative rather than from literary consciousness (Ani, 1994).

The African American slave experience can be used as a guide to understanding resiliency specifically within the African-American church experience: how senses of community and group identification are obtained. As a group, African Americans experience knowing through emotion or feeling (Ani, 1994). The traditional African-American church experience is affective in nature and values the community as a whole while focusing on interpersonal relationships. Within the traditional African-American church, African Americans use music and touch to connect to Self and each other. Songs tend to elicit emotion as they symbolize harmony and an emotional balance within (Ani, 1994).

Stories are told through song and testimony. As a result of the research conducted by the authors of this text, observations in the African-American church suggest that life is guided by songs and stories that unfold over generations within the African-American culture.

This concept of narrative about our lives and experiences has been influenced by the premise of what is called social constructionist theory (Edwards, 1994; Hoffman, 1990).

Narrative Inquiry

"Social constructionism is principally concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live" (Gergen, 1992, pp.3-18). This theory is based on the notion that ideas about the world are social inventions that emanate from conversations with others. These ideas are based upon the constant evolution of stories people express in their lifetime (Hoffman, 1990).

Stories or narratives are extremely important simply because they shape our lives and relationships. Stories that are passed down from generation to generation are what help guide most of our decision-making. White & Epston (1990) argued: (1) It is the stories in which we situate our experience that determine the meaning that we give to experience. (2) It is these stories that determine the selection of those aspects of experience to be expressed. (3) It is these stories that determine the shape of the expression that we give to those aspects of experience. (4) It is these stories that determine

6

real effects and directions in our lives and in our
relationships.

Conducting A Story Circle

The story circle is oral and affective in nature. Stories
tell individuals about their "whole" selves. They share their
feelings, thoughts and emotions with other people. They free
their spirit in a way that is incomprehensible to outsiders.
The term "outsiders," refers to either observers of the story
circle, or other cultures that may not be familiar with story-
telling traditions in their society.

To begin the process, the facilitator should convene the
circle. If the people in the group aren't already familiar with
one another, they should introduce themselves. To make it
easier, the facilitator may want to introduce himself first, and
then look to the person to his left or right to continue.
Setting up this way saves times and it gets the group to
thinking in terms of moving around the circle. The importance of
facilitating a story circle is to maintain a sense of trust and
order. It is also important to value listening. Listening is
always more important than talking. In addition, it is
important to monitor body language within the story circle. By
monitoring body language, one may notice hidden messages that
are not told in the story itself (Junebug Productions, 2000).

Some people may worry about not being able to come up with a story when it is their time to speak. If you trust the circle, and it is your turn to tell a story, a story should come naturally. If a person is experiencing too much anxiety within the circle, that person does have the option of passing his or her turn. Another important factor is that a person does not necessarily have to like or be able to relate to a story being told, however, that person must respect the other person's right to tell that story (Junebug, 2000).

The story circle tends to create a comfortable environment that encompasses warmth and trust. The facilitator's job is to make sure each person connects the themes and patterns that the stories have created. All stories should connect in some way or another. It is also appropriate for members of the story circle to challenge one another after the story telling has taken place. When it is time to process, members should discuss where they felt connected and focus on feelings and thought processes. The facilitator should also let everyone share responsibility for keeping track of time because it can last a while. Also, a follow-up activity should be conducted for the group as well.

Conclusion

When counseling African-American clients, counselors need to be cognizant of the various cultural experiences that play a

major role in the development of the ethos African American

clients.   Storytelling still exists today in African-American

churches and families.   This technique seems to assist African-

American clients in understanding their issues better while,

helping them to become more capable of handling issues that may

arise in the future.

References

Ani, Marimba (Richards, D.) (1994). Yorugu: an African-centered critique of European cultural thought and behavior. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Edwards, T. (1994). Transgenerational development of fatherhood meanings. Unpublished manuscript, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg.

Gergen, K. J. (1992). Social constructionist inquiry: Context and implications. In K.J. Gergen & K.E. Davis (Eds.), The social construction of the person (pp. 3-18). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Hoffman, L. (1990). Constructing realities: An art of lenses. Family process, 29, 1-12.

Junebug Productions. (2000). Junebug's story circle process. http://home.gnom.org/~junebug/story4.html.

White, M. & Epston, D. (1990). Narrative means to therapeutic ends. New York: W.W. Norton.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC®

REPRODUCTION RELEASE
(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: KEEPING THE STORY ALIVE: NARRATIVE IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH & COMMUNITY

Author(s): CLAY, L. K.; WEST-OLATUNJI, C. A., & COOLEY, S. R.

Corporate Source: XAVIER UNIVERSITY of LA	Publication Date: 2001

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to each document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified documents, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) **1**	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) **2A**	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY _____ TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) **2B**
Level 1 [X]	Level 2A [ ]	Level 2B [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate these documents as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here,→ please

Signature:	Printed Name/Position/Title: CIRECIE A. OLATUNJI /ASST. PROF
Organization/Address: XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LA 1 DREXEL DRIVE, 59A NEW ORLEANS, LA 70125-1098	Telephone: 504-485-5261 FAX: 504-485-7909
	E-Mail Address: colatunj@xula.edu Date: 3/26/02

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of these documents from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of these documents. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse: **ERIC Counseling & Student Services** **University of North Carolina at Greensboro** **201 Ferguson Building** **PO Box 26171** **Greensboro, NC 27402-6171**