

Afrocentricity and social work education

Leslie D. Hollingsworth^a and Frederick B. Phillips^b

^aSchool of Social Work, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA; ^bProgressive Life Center, Washington, DC, USA

ABSTRACT

Twenty-two African American, biracial, Caucasian, and Latino students enrolled in an advanced graduate social work course aimed at approaching interpersonal practice from an Afrocentric perspective. Curricular content included historical contributions of African-descent people, components of Afrocentricity and African-centered social work, and principles and methods associated with NTU psychotherapy. Students demonstrated a slight but statistically nonsignificant overall increase in Afrocentricity. However, significant increases on two of the 14 items used to measure Afrocentricity were noted. Ninety-five percent of students were able to demonstrate how Afrocentric perspectives could be applied to an assigned case. Integration of Afrocentric conceptual principles as they related to the case study was lower. Observations from instructor field notes are provided. Challenges and recommendations are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Afrocentricity; Afrocentricity;
African American students;
African-centeredness; Blacks

African Americans have been found to have need for mental health services comparable to, or greater than, that of Caucasians (Snowden, 2001). At the same time utilization of professional services for mental health disorders is low (Neighbors et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2007). While African Americans may be using more informal supports than professional services, Woodward (2011) found African American and Black Caribbean adults with a mood or anxiety disorder significantly more likely than White adults to not receive any type of help (professional services or informal support). Using data from the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress, this was true, even when the experience of major discrimination in services was considered although neither major discrimination over the lifetime nor everyday experiences of discrimination had a significant direct effect on help-seeking. Other factors found, in the Woodward analysis, to be significant predictors of not having received help were being male and working while persons with higher incomes were less likely to have not received help. Woodward noted that in her sample, Blacks had significantly lower incomes than Whites, suggesting that low income may have played a role in race being a predictor of lower help-seeking.

While structural and practical factors may be contributors, interpersonal barriers in service delivery and receipt have been considered as well (Barksdale, Azur, & Leaf, 2010; Borum, 2007; Thompson, Baxile, & Akbar, 2004). Some question the preparation of social workers and other mental health professionals to deliver services in a way most likely to successfully engage and retain African Americans in treatment (Borum, 2007; Thompson et al., 2004). Specific barriers have been identified (Thurston & Phares, 2008) and modifications recommended and tested (Grote, Zuckoff, Swartz, Bledsoe, & Geibel, 2007). The purpose of this article is to report the outcome of a teaching intervention aimed at increasing social work students' knowledge of and commitment to culturally relevant practice methods with African American families. The ultimate goal is to contribute to

creating a workforce prepared to deliver culturally competent social work to African American families.

Scholarship relevant to cultural considerations

Barriers contributing to race-based disparities in mental health care have been identified. In a study of mental health service utilization (Thurston & Phares, 2008), African American parents perceived more barriers to mental health services for themselves and more child-related barriers to utilization than did Caucasian parents. In a study of African American and Caucasian youth entering a federally funded system of care project (Barksdale et al., 2010), African American youth were significantly less likely than Caucasian youth to have utilized outpatient services, school-based services, or residential/inpatient services. Youth referred from the juvenile justice system or self- or caregiver-referred were less likely to have received any of these services compared with youth referred from a mental health agency.

African Americans may hold expectations and attitudes that render them wary of mental health services in general and of service providers in particular when the providers are of a different race from themselves. Black clients' preferences for a Black counselor have been found to be predicted by high cultural mistrust, low assimilation attitudes, and strong internalized Afrocentric attitudes. In their study of attitudes and expectations of mental health services of 201 African Americans, Thompson et al. (2004) identified themes of fear of misdiagnosis, brainwashing, and labeling (specifically labeling strong expressions of emotion as illness). Borum (2007) theorizes that African American clients may view social service agencies and their representatives as rooted in the systematic oppression of Black people. In such agencies, these clients may be criticized for their parenting and family practices; speech and language may be misunderstood, methods of coping unrecognized, and strengths overlooked.

Cultural concerns about the therapeutic relationship itself also emerge. In Brown, Conner, and McMurray's (2012) study of African American adults who had experienced at least one episode of depression in the preceding 6 months, trusting therapeutic relationships emerged as a key element in effective treatment. In the Thompson et al. (2004) study, African American participants raised concerns about therapists' ability to connect and establish a relationship, particularly one involving empathy, compassion, and taking time for the development of trust.

Participants in the Thompson et al. (2004) study also raised a number of issues related to race within the context of service provision. These included a perception that mental health providers will not be able to be sensitive to the social and economic realities of the lives of African American people, a belief that most clinicians lack the knowledge of African American life and struggles necessary to accept or understand them, and a concern that mental health providers may hold stereotypes about African Americans. African Americans interpreted bringing up race, especially in the first session, as indication that the provider holds racial stereotypes. Participants monitored therapists' reactions to financial, legal, employment, and discrimination issues and interpreted signs of anxiety and discomfort with racial issues as messages about the provider's racial attitudes and competence to work with African Americans.

Implications for the use of culturally specific approaches

The above findings lend support to the proposition that barriers to successful engagement of Black clients in treatment are endemic to relational factors having to do with the treatment system or provider or with relational factors having to do with mistrust Black clients may bring to services provided by a non-Black person. These potential barriers to equitable receipt of services provide support for the creation or strengthening of methods of service delivery that will be responsive to the needs and preferences of African Americans. In the absence of such knowledge, professionals may assume that the history, cultural practices, and social environment of African Americans are the same as those for Whites and therefore that the same practice methods are appropriate.

Afrocentricity as a culturally specific concept

There is some acceptance of Afrocentricity as a conceptual framework for formulating a culturally specific model of practice with African Americans (Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Graham, 1999; Harvey, 2003; Jones, Hopson, & Gomes, 2012; Schiele, 2003). According to Schiele (2003) “Recently the concept ‘Afrocentricity’ has been used to describe the cultural values of people of African descent. . . . Social workers are encouraged to embrace the Afrocentric paradigm because of its emphasis on eliminating oppression and spiritual alienation” (p. 185).

A commonly accepted definition of Afrocentricity is the act of placing African and African American history, culture, and heritage at the center of all that has to do with African American people (Schiele, 2003). Jones et al. (2012) add to that definition, describing Afrocentricity as “a framework that enables one to approach feelings, knowledge and actions as a comprehensive whole from the lens of African Americans rather than as objects on the outer limits of the European experience” (p. 39).

Schiele (2003) critiques “ethnic sensitive” or “cross-cultural” practice as “a step in the right direction toward cultural sensitivity and political consciousness” but as deemphasizing the legitimacy of using the cultural values of people of color as a theoretical base to develop new practice models. Borum (2007) cautions that “social workers and other helping professionals should be aware that African American families and communities need to be understood in the context of their very unique history in the U.S., [one] that represents a far different history than that of any other ethnic group in America” (p. 119). According to Schiele (2003), the objectives of Afrocentricity are considered to promote an alternative social science paradigm more reflective of the cultural and political reality of African Americans; to dispel the negative distortions about people of African ancestry by legitimizing and disseminating a more culturally based, historically accurate worldview; and to promote a worldview that will facilitate the engagement of members of all cultural and ethnic groups as equal participants in human and societal transformation toward spiritual, moral, and humanistic ends (Schiele, 2003).

Similar to, and building on the work of other Afrocentrists (e.g., Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Harvey, 2003; Myers, 1988), Schiele (2003) describes three major assumptions about human beings characterized by the Afrocentric paradigm: first, that human identity is a collective identity; second, that the spiritual or nonmaterial component of human beings is just as important and valid as the material component; and third, that the affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid. From an Afrocentric perspective, and speaking specifically about violent crimes by youth and about substance abuse, Schiele considers oppression and “spiritual alienation” as the major source of human problems among African-descent people in the United States. To counteract these social ills from an Afrocentric standpoint, he advocates that social workers strive to replace spiritual alienation with values that affirm a more holistic, spiritual, and optimistic viewpoint of human beings. In creating a conducive practice environment, he advocates a professional relationship that is personalized and reciprocal.

Harvey (2003) highlights the need for a shift from a western perspective to an African-centered one in practice with people of African descent. This requires employing African values and ethics, using methods that are strengths-focused and that assist people of African-descent in becoming self-determinative and finding “their God-given purpose in life” (p. 118). A social welfare program model is recommended in which cultural precepts, intent, content, process, and objectives or desired outcomes are grounded in traditional African principles.

Finally, Jones et al. (2012) suggest that Africentric methods of practice can promote well-being by understanding the impact on African Americans of the social context in which they live, and by developing a social context that creates the conditions for resilience. These authors write: “As a method of intervention, the Africentric paradigm can serve as an effective tool for empowering individuals and communities, reaching for clients’ strengths, and addressing disparities and oppression. It may also be useful for observing uniqueness among African American clients, acknowledging the variation within diverse groups. . . . From an Africentric perspective, this will require creating social norms that value African-American heritage and strengths inherent in African American communities” (p. 50).

NTU as an Afrocentric model of practice

The NTU approach reflects the principles and processes of Afrocentricity. NTU is a root word of the Bantu language. It is defined as the basic element that unifies all parts of the universe and, as such, is considered the essence of life and living (Phillips, 1996). The goals, objectives, principles, and methods of the NTU model are elaborated in the intervention section of this paper.

Hypotheses and their correspondence to the research design

Karenga (1993), developer of the Nguzo Saba, advocated these seven principles “as a communitarian African value system necessary to build community and serve as social glue and moral orientation for cultural practice” (p. 173). Therefore, assisting clients to function within these guidelines is an objective of the NTU model of practice. However, in applying the NTU model to offering an advanced Afrocentric practice course, we proceeded according to the assumption that it was first necessary for the practitioner to be able to function within the guidelines. The course was structured accordingly. Our hypotheses, therefore, were the following:

- (1) Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate a significantly higher level of Afrocentricity compared to their level at the outset of the course.
- (2) Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate an ability to apply Afrocentric principles and methods to address the needs of an African American case study family.

Method

Participants

Twenty-two students enrolled in the fall 2012 semester-long course. While Caucasian students make up the majority of students in the Master of Social Work program in which the course was offered, a majority of class members ($N = 14$) identified as Black or African American, four as White or Caucasian, three as Latino(a), and one as biracial. The approximate average age of enrolled students was 25, with the majority having entered the program directly from undergraduate studies. (One of the Caucasian students was somewhat older than the class average and was enrolled in a different professional master’s degree program on campus. One of the Caucasian students was enrolled in the school’s doctoral program.) Seven students were male, again an overrepresentation compared with the student population across the program.)

Procedure

Sampling

The class was offered as a three-credit elective within the Interpersonal Practice (Micro) concentration. Students were recruited through advertising in the School of Social Work, including using Facebook pages and blogs available exclusively to School of Social Work students. The course was also advertised in other professional schools on campus. The course design and materials were approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Interventions

Consistent with the Afrocentric pedagogical approach (Martin & Martin, 1995), the intervention was divided into three parts: (a) exposure to content on African and African American history, (b) exposure to content on the Afrocentric perspective as a conceptual framework, and (c) exposure to content on the NTU model of psychotherapy as a method.

Exposure to content on African and African American history

Content on African history and culture was delivered through the use of lectures, assigned readings, historical and practice demonstration, videos, class discussions, and guest presenters. In class guest presenters included African American faculty from various university departments whose scholarship focused on African/African American religious history and practices; feminism, womanism, and the Black Power movement; and economic relations between contemporary African leaders and European businesses. Initial content covered what has been referred to as the period of the practice of Maat, referring to centuries of well-being, growth, and prosperity of African people (Karenga, 1993). It included the origins of man in Africa; the early establishment of African kingdoms and dynasties; contributions of African people to development of a civilized society; the establishment of African institutions of higher education; the establishment of organized religion and spirituality; and the location of Africa at the center of world trade and Africans' travels to what would become "the New World" (Clarke, 1970).

Content on African and African American history was drawn substantially from Karenga (1993). It covered the period of the Maafa, which contained evidence that after periodic invasions that included the taking of African people into involuntary servitude as slaves, many African countries were eventually taken over. The settling of Europeans in the Americas and the creation of vast plantations that required huge amounts of labor gave incentive to the establishment of slavery in what was called the New World. Gates (n.d.) references the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database in noting that between 1525 and 1866, in the entire history of the slave trade to the New World, 12.5 million Africans were shipped to the New World and 10.7 million survived the dreaded Middle Passage, disembarking in North America, the Caribbean, and South America.

Students were exposed to the way cultural destruction was used as a mechanism to sustain the enslavement, degradation, and control of African people and to evidence of slave revolts as demonstration that African people did not passively acquiesce to slavery (Karenga, 1993).

Finally, although slavery as an institution ended over 300 years after it began, it was soon followed by the establishment of the Jim Crow system of discrimination and destruction (Karenga, 1993). Students considered the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements as other examples of the resistance of African-descent people to discriminatory and oppressive practices, efforts that eventually ended with legislation aimed first at racial desegregation and later at racial integration and voting rights in the United States. Similar acts of resistance took place throughout the African diaspora. These events gave rise to the creation of Pan-Africanism whereby similarities were recognized in the oppression taking place on the continent of Africa and in the West (Karenga, 1993).

Exposure to the Afrocentric perspective/African worldview

Content in this segment was delivered through lectures, assigned readings, weekly journaling, videos, and class discussions. In his chapter "A General Paradigm of African-Centered Social Work," Harvey (2003) writes that social work should be defined by the subject group's history and worldview, providing support for integrating Afrocentric content in education. He referred to this form of social work, when directed to African American people, as Africentric social work. Martin and Martin (1995) used the term "Black experience-based social work" to describe social work that reflects a Black identity or Black presence. The goal of such practice was to "create culturally versatile black people ... who are able to overcome whatever personal, social, or mental disorders thwart their maximum potential for maneuverability upward in society" (p. 257). Components of African-centered social work practice exemplified in the work of both Harvey (2003) and Martin and Martin (1995), are the following:

- Grounding in African and African American history and culture, covering contributions of African-descent people to world civilization, building knowledge, and correcting myths.
- Recognition of the vulnerability of Black families to racial oppression and victimization.

- Understanding how African people internalize oppression.
- Historical empathy for the trauma suffered by African-descent people historically.
- A commitment to the cultural versatility of Black people, involving assisting African-descent people in aspiring to be the best they can be and in reaching those goals.
- Knowledge of African values and ethics as laid out in the Forty-two Declarations of Innocence that guided African people traditionally, and the seven cardinal virtues of Maat (truth, justice, righteousness, law/order, reciprocity, balance, harmony).
- A commitment to the self-determination of Black people.

Exposure to the NTU model of psychotherapy

Content on the NTU model was derived from readings on the model along with one individual Skyped interview each with Dr. Frederick Phillips, founder and former CEO of the Progressive Life Center in Washington DC, and Mr. Peter Fitts, who was clinical director of the Progressive Life Center. The goal of NTU is to assist people and systems to become authentic and balanced in a way that is in alignment with the natural order (Phillips, 1996). Natural order here implies a unity of mind, body, and spirit throughout life. It is based on core principles of ancient African and Afrocentric worldviews that have been nurtured through African culture and augmented by Western conceptualizations of humanistic psychology. These core principles are (a) harmony, that is, a state of being in sync with the forces of life; (b) balance, that is, the process of leveling the various forces and energy fields that are constantly coming to bear on an individual; (c) the interconnectedness of all phenomena; and (d) authenticity, that is, realness, genuineness, and spontaneity. Two additional principles, cultural awareness (i.e., awareness of one's cultural self) and affective epistemology (i.e., the discovery of knowledge or truth through both feeling experience and verbal, cognitive interaction) have also been discussed within the context of NTU.

NTU has two primary objectives (Phillips, 1996). The first is to assist the client to function harmoniously and authentically within himself or herself and in his or her relationships, within the context of the natural order. Accomplishing this goal allows a set of natural healing forces to function properly. It requires that the individual or family client system is aware of itself. Such awareness involves being in mental, physical, cultural, and spiritual contact. The second objective is to assist the client to function within the guidelines of the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, Karenga, 1998). These principles are considered guidelines for healthy living. The principles in Swahili and in English and considered applicable to African-descent people throughout the world (African diaspora), along with their meanings and intentions, are the following:

- (1) Umoja (unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, and nation.
- (2) Kujichagulia (self-determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves.
- (3) Ujima (collective work and responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and to make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.
- (4) Ujamaa (cooperative economics): To build and maintain economic enterprises and to profit together from them.
- (5) Nia (purpose): To make as our collective vocation the building and developing of our community and to be in harmony with our spiritual purpose.
- (6) Kuumba (creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way that we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful than we inherited it.
- (7) Imani (faith): To believe with all our hearts in our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and our people.

A persistent theme throughout content on NTU is collectivism or a commitment to the well-being of the group (Phillips, 1996). NTU considers the therapy relationship a spiritual and sacred

one, particularly within the context of the value placed on personalism and interpersonal relations. Healing occurs through the clinician rather than by the clinician and in a way that conveys that the clinician has the client's best interest at heart.

The NTU approach involves five processes or phases that are presented in a particular order although they may reoccur at any point within the therapy relationship (Phillips, 1996). In the first phase, harmony, the emphasis is on developing a shared consciousness or shared trust between the clinician and the client. In the second phase, awareness, clients are helped to uncover and recognize their needs, wants, strengths, weaknesses, and emotions and simultaneously to uncover how their behaviors, fears, or anxieties may be interfering with their goals and desires for themselves. It is in the third phase, alignment, that clients are helped to work through their fears and anxieties and to realign their behaviors with their needs and wants. This task may involve coming to terms with fears and anxieties that have interfered with achieving their goals—but all in the interest of achieving harmonious and authentic functioning within themselves and their relationships. The fourth phase, actualization, allows a period of trying on and practicing the new perspectives and behaviors in a way that is consistent with the realigned method of functioning that occurred in the previous phase. Homework or task assignments may take place here. Clients may report examples of changed behaviors that are consistent with the work that has taken place. It is in the fifth phase, synthesis, that the client integrates the new attitudes and behaviors to form a new self-concept and reality. These phases have as their ultimate objective the empowerment of the client system in alignment with the natural order, an accomplishment that allows the client to leave the therapy process in control of her- or himself, including the ability to express appropriate requests for termination.

Research design

A one-group pretest-posttest design (Harris et al., 2006) was used to examine changes in levels of Afrocentricity from start to end of the course. In this commonly used quasi-experimental design without a control group, a single pretest measurement is taken, an intervention is implemented, and a posttest measurement is taken. In this study, the course was the intervention.

An end-of-term written essay assignment examined students' ability to apply the model. Essays have the benefit of "tap[ping] complex thinking by requiring students to organize and integrate information, interpret information, construct arguments, give explanations, evaluate the merit of ideas, and [or] carry out other types of reasoning (Cashin; Gronlund & Linn; McMillan; Thorndike; and Worthen et al. as cited in Piontek, 2008)." A scoring rubric provided information to students about the criteria by which the assignment would be evaluated (graded). Rubrics (scoring keys) specify the educational criteria for scoring and the amount of credit or points to be assigned for each criterion (Piontek, 2008).

Measurement approaches

The Afrocentricity Scale (Grills & Longshore, 1996) was used as a self-report measure of Africentrism, which the developers of the measure define as "the degree to which a person adheres to the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles) in African and African American culture" (p. 87). This scale was chosen because it best represented, in the eyes of the instructor, the elements that were consistent with Afrocentricity construct. We did not find a measure that examined Africentric practice knowledge or concepts. The survey contains 15 items and uses a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Items that did not reflect Afrocentric values were reverse-scored. Higher scores reflected a stronger adherence to their more recent examination of the scale's properties; Cokley and Williams (2005) obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .73. The researchers interpreted these findings as indicating that participants who completed the scale were fairly consistent in answering items the creators of the scale thought measured a general construct of Africentrism. However, at the subscale level, three of the six factors yielded modest

Cronbach's alphas and were otherwise uninterpretable, leading the researchers to suggest that, conceptually, it may be more meaningful to think of the Africentric Scale as measuring a global unitary construct rather than measuring orthogonal dimensions of Afrocentrism that yield separate scores (pp. 839–840).

Students completed the pretest upon arriving at the first class. The posttest was completed as the very last activity of the final class. (In our survey, one item on the Afrocentricity Scale—"I am doing a lot to improve my neighborhood"—was dropped because the word "improve" was inadvertently left off, posing the risk that participants would not have interpreted the item as intended.) In addition to pretests and posttests, students wrote a required end-of-term philosophy statement assignment in which they were provided an African American family case study and directed to discuss how they would apply the principles and methods of NTU to formulate a plan for engaging, assessing, and intervening.

Criterion-referenced grading was used in evaluating student performance on the essay assignment. (Piontek, 2008). Criterion-referenced grading "focuses on the absolute performance against predetermined criteria. Criterion systems assume that grades should measure 'how much' a student has mastered a specified body of knowledge" (Piontek, p. 11). Using a point system, students' work was evaluated according to

- Their summary introduction of the history, philosophy, and theory of family dysfunction that characterizes the NTU model, including how the four principles of NTU and the Nguzo Saba (seven principles of Kwanzaa) are integrated in the model.
- Their application of the five phases of NTU psychotherapy to provide family therapy services to the case study family.
- Their use of correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.
- Their use of the *American Psychological Association Publications Manual* (6th edition) in the paper's structure, headings, citation, and reference list.

Results

Analyses performed

Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to calculate differences in pretest and posttest means on the Africentricity Scale as a composite and for the individual items. The independent *t*-test is used to test for differences in means or to test a criterion measure between two groups of scores where the subjects' scores from one group are independent of the scores in the other group (Winn & McGrain, 1985). Because of the small class size and subsequent potential for identifying certain students, results were not analyzed by demographic differences.

Only a slight increase was noted in composite scores between pre- and posttests (3.31 out of a possible 4.0 at pretest; 3.44 out of a possible 4.0 at posttest). The difference was not statistically significant. However, significant differences in means were noted on two of the individual items: Blacks/African Americans should make their community better than it was when they found it—premean: 3.28; postmean: 3.76, $p < .001$ ($p = .0009$, one-tailed *t*-test, $t = 3.37$); Blacks/African Americans should build and maintain their own communities—premean: 2.58; postmean: 3.33, $p < .01$ ($p = .0024$, one-tailed *t*-test, $t = 3.01$).

Univariate analyses ("Descriptive Statistics," n.d.) examined the frequency distribution of students' levels of performance. Univariate analysis is a form of descriptive statistics involving the examination across cases of one variable at a time.

Frequency distributions constitute one of the most common ways to describe a single variable (in this case demonstration of successful performance of the rubric criteria). We modified the criteria slightly to separate them into three distinct criteria and excluding grammatical correctness of use of

the *APA Publications Manual*. Essays were de-identified and coded using 1 to represent the presence of the criterion in the essay and 0 for the absence of that criterion. Sixty-eight percent of class members provided a summary explanation of how the Nguzo Saba are integrated in the NTU model. Only 49% described all four key principles of the NTU model. In contrast, 95% of the students (all but one) appropriately applied all five phases of practice from the NTU model to the assigned case.

In addition to the above analyses, 20 of the 22 class members completed online course evaluations—a process managed by a separate university department. Students responded to each of four core items of a Likert-type scale with five response choices: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree. For the five-point scale, student ratings were the following: Overall, this was an excellent course, 4.33; overall, the instructor was an excellent teacher, 4.71; I had a strong desire to take this course, 4.42; and I learned a good deal of factual material in this course, 4.06.

Discussion

The purpose of the analyses reported here was to report the outcome of a teaching intervention aimed at increasing Master of Social Work students' knowledge of and commitment to culturally relevant practice methods with African American families. The first of our two hypotheses was not supported. Although there was a very slight increase in composite scores on an Afrocentricity scale between pre- and posttest, the difference was not statistically significant. Interesting here, however, was the finding of significant pre-/posttest differences on two of the 14 items measured. These were "Blacks/African Americans should make their community better than it was when they found it" and "Blacks/African Americans should build and maintain their own communities." This is interesting because although three factors in the six-factor solution in a factor analysis of scale items conducted by Cokley and Williams (2005) were deemed uninterpretable, three others were interpretable. The third of the three interpretable factors was labeled Community Orientation. This third factor was made up of the same two items for which significant differences were found in our analysis. Therefore, although Cokley and Williams suggested measuring the Africentric Scale as a global, unitary construct, there may be support for considering the two items as reflective of a community orientation and as demonstrating an increase in community orientation between pre- and postsurveys of students.

The lack of significant pre-/postdifferences on the composite Afrocentricity scale in our study may also suggest that students were operating at a relatively high level of Afrocentricity at the time they entered the class; for example, some may have been African studies undergraduate majors, resulting in their coming in with a high level of Afrocentricity. It may also reflect other subgroup differences, such as race, age, or professional discipline, that were not measured.

Results were mixed with regard to support for the second hypothesis, that is, that upon completion of the course, students would demonstrate an ability to apply Africentric principles and methods to addressing the needs of an African American case study family. Almost all students described how they would apply the principles as demonstrated in the NTU model. However, their consideration of the Nguzo Saba, which are considered part of the NTU model, and to explain the four core principles of NTU within the context of the model was much lower. This may be explained a tendency of the students to prioritize praxis over theory. Methods may also have been emphasized over theory and principles in the delivery of the course. Table 1 contains substantive student comments on the end-of-term course evaluation that was overseen by the university in which the School of Social Work was located.

Instructor field notes and observations

Field notes of the instructor, the first author, may provide additional guidance for others who may use the course as a model in their own teaching. First, the class seemed to take on a unique culture and identity. It was not unusual for students to email the instructor with news articles, journal articles, or web-based information they had come across that they thought other class members

Table 1. Student comments on university-based evaluation.

Student number ¹	Student comment
2	Professor was knowledgeable about the course topic and shared personal experiences.
3	I really enjoyed how much group interaction/discussion was allowed and encouraged. The guest speakers were also extremely interesting. This course needs to be offered again! The Kwanzaa ceremonies were awesome.
7	I really enjoyed the group discussions and case studies. These really helped to show us how to apply the Afro-Centric approach in therapy. The readings were very informative and helped to pull things together. I absolutely loved the guest lectures because it opened up black studies beyond America. Learning history is very important when structuring how to maneuver into the future.
8	Choices of articles, guest speakers, videos, skype presentations, and class discussions helped to meet goals and objectives; most informative; lots of opportunity for critical thinking.
9	The quality of instruction was excellent.
11	The instructor is incredibly intelligent and seems to truly enjoy teaching. Her energy and intelligence allowed for great learning opportunities through engagement and class discourse.
12	I took this course specifically for its focus on African American families, many of whom are overrepresented in child welfare/juvenile justice systems. It was informative and very educative. I specifically appreciated the introduction the NTU model; my first time of coming across such a model for working with black-descended people. All the guest presenters laid the foundation for what was to come using the NTU model.
13	The class was interesting but it would have been helpful to use less time for class discussion and more time on how to actually apply an africanic approach to therapy. Although it was beneficial to learn about the history, I expected there to be a stronger emphasis on how to use the approach not so much about African/African American history.
15	This course should be offered permanently.
16	Instructor is excellent!! She clearly knows the content and has a wonderful approach to facilitate class discussions.
17	The guest speakers were really interesting and offered a lot of new information for me. At times I thought that the debates/discussions between students got a little too heated and tended to exclude certain individuals. I realized that that wasn't really something the instructor can control, but I felt like some students were excluding others and didn't want all of the students in the class to be there or included.
20	Instruction was done through a diverse and engaging set of media including guest lecturers, group discussion, readings, etc. I think more could have been done to promote the cultivation of intergroup relationships within the courses, as it ended up feeling a little too clique-y, rather than having a true learning community. Perhaps more discussion of our own field experiences would have been helpful in getting us to go deeper beneath the surface, both in terms of getting to know each other and engaging with these issues.

¹Twenty of the 22 students enrolled in the class completed course evaluations that were completed and submitted to the university department that managed all course evaluations. Student numbers were arbitrarily assigned by that university department. Where no student number is listed, there was no comment from that student.

might be interested in. One particular student frequently emailed the instructor links to YouTube videos that, when shown to the full class, prompted useful dialogue that complemented the focus of the course. Another student, after asking the permission of the other class members, brought her mother to one of the classes.

Students were also protective of each other. For example, the second author, in a Skype interview, described an example in which elements of the NTU psychotherapy model had been integrated with a well-known evidence-based model to create a method of intervention with youth in foster care. A conversation ensued in class about the merits of that decision. One African American student vehemently took the position that African-descent people own so little and have lost so much that when an innovation such as the NTU model is created, its African American origins should be maintained rather than having its identity submerged within a larger method. Another African American student took the opposite position, insisting that if an innovation can be integrated in a way that is useful to a larger population, it should be done. The controversy prompted the instructor to create an exercise in which positions on the issue were created by physically marking off the classroom and asking students to place themselves according to their proximity to one of the two positions. They were asked to explain their position. African American students were very active in making sure that all the students were supported in expressing their views and being heard, a demonstration of the leadership observed among African American students and of the cohesion that occurred among all class members.

Second, the presence of an African American student majority in a class led by an African American instructor seemed to help those students “find their voice.” They expressed viewpoints that may not have been expressed in the typical circumstance in the School of Social Work in which the course was offered, where only one or two students in a class were African American. One example occurred when an African American student explained her support for the existence of an Association of Black Social Work Students as meeting a need of Black students to interact solely with each other on topics of relevance to themselves. On another occasion, a number of Black students, responding to a YouTube video clip, were open in expressing their understanding of and support for the opposition of alumni of a historically Black college to the hiring of a Caucasian football coach. The discussion prompted an opportunity to relate the incident to cultural awareness as a principle of NTU and to consider the meaning of the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa (Nguzo Saba).

Third, with a larger number of male students than was usual in most classes, I observed several of the male students assuming leadership roles. One such African American student made a decision to pursue a doctoral degree that he has followed through with. Another student in this cohort and two others in subsequent cohorts are enrolled in PhD programs.

Fourth, although the class as a whole seemed to create its own culture, a distinct sense of “groupness” seemed to occur among the African American class members. They could be observed joking or teasing with each other and referring to incidents that had occurred or that were upcoming beyond the class. While this could be interpreted within several principles of Kwanzaa, for example, unity or collective work and responsibility, one student, possibly a non-African American student or an African American student who did not feel part of the group, complained, in the anonymous end-of-term course evaluation, about the “cliques” that emerged in the course. Given the possibility that the complaining student was not African American, the first author/instructor experienced a pull toward protectiveness of the Caucasian students and a dilemma of whether to intervene of their behalf. This raises the question of how African American faculty in predominantly White institutions uphold values of equality and justice while supporting cultural group values such as those associated with the Nguzo Saba.

Fifth, the issue emerged as to the role of Caucasian students when African American students are in a majority and display a sense of strength and empowerment. In the philosophy statement assignment, one Caucasian student described an internal struggle with trying to find a personal role in that situation. The student finally resolved the dilemma by making a decision to assume the role of ally, even though the need for such ally-ship had not been raised. This raises the question of whether it is difficult for members of dominant racial groups in U.S. society to relinquish power to members of racial minority groups, even though, as a profession, the empowerment of clients is upheld as a value. How does this student’s struggle align with the desire for self-determination (Kujichagulia) inherent in the concept of Afrocentricity?

Sixth, it was noticed that the students, both African American and Caucasian, had very little knowledge of African and African American history and culture, particularly from an affirmative perspective. Their comments on the end-of-term course evaluations highlighted their appreciation of having obtained that knowledge. (See [Table 1](#).)

Finally, evidence of African American students’ increased identity and pride as African-descent people was observed. One student reported having announced to her field liaison her intentional desire to provide services to African American people. When asked what specific treatment population she wanted to focus on, her reply was “I just want to do work with African American people.” A number of the African American students became active in the Association of Black Social Work Students at a time when the student chapter had been close to extinction. One female African American student accepted the role of president of the School’s Association of Black Social Work Students. Three African American students created a global special studies arrangement that provided a three-week service experience in African countries. (A Latina student in the class created a similar course involving travel to a Latin American country.)

Limitations of the study

The literature on service utilization and satisfaction of African-descent people, around which the study was formulated, is dated, and more recent knowledge is needed. Additionally, one semester was too short to cover all of the content deemed necessary to achieve the goals of the course within the three identified objectives. More attention needs to be given to ensuring that students understand how NTU practice builds on the core principles of NTU and Afrocentricity. This study examined social work students' acquisition of values and practice methods associated with an Afrocentric perspective but did not measure the effect of such practice on actual client satisfaction and retention. That research is still needed. We are also not able to empirically verify an increase in actual practice preparation. There may be measures beyond the Afrocentricity scale (Grills & Longshore, 1996) that are useful in that regard. In spite of these limitations, however, the increased commitment to African American communities and the personal and interpersonal growth observed among class participants suggests a positive impact on students' social work education experience and practice preparation.

Conclusion and implications for social work education

There is indication from this study that using an Afrocentric teaching model can result in change in a diverse group of students' ability to acquire and apply culturally specific knowledge and methods of service provision, particularly in terms of an increased commitment to bettering the community of African-descent people. Further attention is needed to updating research on which the study goals are based, strengthening students' integration of conceptual with applied knowledge, examining race- and ethnic-specific and other subgroup differences, and demonstrating real-life social work practice applications.

Funding

The research and evaluation reported in this article were made possible through funding by the National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, through funding and other technical assistance by the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and through the support of the University of Michigan School of Social Work.

References

- Akbar, N. (1984). Africentric social sciences for human liberation. *Journal of Black Studies*, 14, 395–414. doi:10.1177/002193478401400401
- Asante, M. K. (1988). *Afrocentricity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Barksdale, C. L., Azur, M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Differences in mental health service sector utilization among African American and Caucasian youth entering systems of care programs. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 37(3), 363–373. doi:10.1007/s11414-009-9166-2
- Borum, V. (2007). Why we can't wait! An Afrocentric approach in working with African American families. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 15, 2–3, 117–135. doi:10.1300/J137v15n02_08
- Brown, C., Conner, K. O., & McMurray, M. (2012). Toward cultural adaptation of interpersonal psychotherapy for depressed African American primary care patients. In G. Bernal & M. D. Rodriguez (Eds.), *Cultural adaptations: Tools for evidence-based practice with diverse populations* (pp. 223–238). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Clarke, J. H. (1970). Introduction. In J. G. Jackson (Ed.), *Introduction to African civilizations*. New York, NY: Citadel Press at Kensington Publishing.
- Cokley, K., & Williams, W. (2005). A psychometric examination of the Africentric scale: Challenges in measuring Afrocentric values. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(6), 827–843. doi:10.1177/0021934704266596
- Descriptive statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/statdesc-php>
- Gates, H. L. (n.d.). *How many slaves landed in the U.S.?* Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us/>

- Graham, M. J. (1999). The African-centered worldview: Toward a paradigm for social work. *Journal of Black Studies*, 30(1), 103–122. doi:10.1177/002193479903000106
- Grills, C., & Longshore, D. (1996). Africentrism: Psychometric analyses of a self-report measure. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(1), 86–106. doi:10.1177/0095798460221007
- Grote, N. K., Zuckoff, A., Swartz, H., Bledsoe, S. E., & Geibel, S. (2007). Engaging women who are depressed and economically disadvantaged in mental health treatment. *Social Work*, 12(4), 295–308. doi:10.1093/sw/52.4.295
- Harris, A. D., McGregor, J. C., Perencevich, E. N., Furuno, J. P., Zhu, J., Peterson, D. E., & Finkelstein, J. (2006). The use and interpretation of quasi-experimental studies in medical informatics. *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association*, 13, 16–23. doi: 10.1197/jaia.M1749.
- Harvey, A. R. (2003). A general paradigm of African-centered social work: A social work paradigm shift in the struggle for the liberation of African people. In D. A. Y. Azibo (Ed.), *African-centered psychology: Culture-focusing for multicultural competence* (pp. 109–128). Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press.
- Jones, L. V., Hopson, L. M., & Gomes, A. (2012). Intervening with African-Americans: Culturally specific practice considerations. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 21, 37–54. doi:10.1080/15313204.2012.647389
- Karenga, M. (1993). Introduction to Black studies. In *Black history* (2nd ed., pp. 69–126). Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Karenga, M. (1998). *Kwanzaa: A celebration of family, community, and culture*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Martin, J. M., & Martin, E. P. (1995). *Social work and the Black experience*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.
- Myers, L. (1988). *Understanding an Afrocentric worldview: Introduction to an optimal psychology*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- Neighbors, H. W., Caldwell, C., Williams, D. R., Nesse, R., Taylor, R. J., Bullard, K. M., & Jackson, J. S. (2007). Race, ethnicity, and the use of services for mental disorders: Results from the National Survey of American Life. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64, 485–494.
- Phillips, F. R. (1996). NTU psychotherapy: Principles and processes. In D. A. Y. Azibo (Ed.), *African psychology in historical perspective and related commentary* (pp. 83–97). Trenton, NJ: African World Press.
- Piontek, M. E. (2008). Best practices for designing and grading exams. *CRLT Occasional Papers*, 24, 1–12.
- Schiele, J. H. (2003). Afrocentricity: An emerging paradigm in social work practice. In A. Mazama (Ed.), *The Afrocentric paradigm* (pp. 186–200). Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Snowden, L. R. (2001). Barriers to effective mental health services for African Americans. *Mental Health Services Research*, 3(4), 181–187. doi:10.1023/A:1013172913880
- Thompson, V. L., Baxile, A., & Akbar, M. (2004). African Americans' perceptions of psychotherapy and psychotherapists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35(1), 19–26. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.35.1.19
- Thurston, I. B., & Phares, V. (2008). Mental health service utilization among African American and Caucasian mothers and fathers. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, 76(6), 1058–1067. doi:10.1037/a0014007
- Wang, P. S., Lane, M., Olfson, M., Pincus, H. A., Wells, K. B., & Kessler, R. C. (2005). Twelve-month use of mental health services in the United States. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62, 629–640.
- Williams, D. R., Gonzalez, H. M., Neighbors, H., Nesse, R., Abelson, J. M., Sweetman, J., & Jackson, J. S. (2007). Prevalence and distribution of major depressive disorder in African Americans, Caribbean Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites: Results from the National Survey of American Life. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 64, 305–315.
- Winn, P. L., & McGrain, P. (1985). Comparing two sample means *t* tests. *Physical Therapy*, 65(11), 1730–1733. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/4059334>
- Woodward, A. T. (2011). Discrimination and help-seeking: Use of professional services and informal support among African Americans, Black Caribbeans, and Non-Hispanic Whites with a mental disorder. *Race and Social Problems*, 3, 146–159. doi 10.1007/s12552-011-90490z.

Copyright of Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment is the property of Taylor & Francis Ltd and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.