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Unmasking Racism Through Expressive Arts Therapy with Black American Women:

A Literature Review

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Abstract

This literature review investigates mental health awareness concerning social fears that Black Americans experience in public spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, this research aims to explore the daily encounters of the stressful societal realities and sociohistorical context of Black American women. Unfortunately, there is insufficient data about how social phobia disorder impacts the emotional well-being of the Black population. Therefore, this paper takes a deeper introspect on what triggers racial and social anxiety disorders among Black Americans in public spaces, and it focuses mainly on the mental health experiences and self-perception of Black American women. In addition, the research acknowledges the reaction Black Americans take away from being racially profiled by-laws enforcement. Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that expressive therapies, specifically narrative therapy, can allow Black women to tell their story and explore how therapists can help Black American women cope with feelings of isolation and rejection.

Keywords: Black women, social anxiety disorder, narrative therapy

**Unmasking Racism Through Expressive Arts Therapy With Black American Women:
A Literature Review**

Love takes off masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live
within.

—James Baldwin

Introduction

I will examine in my thesis the social ills of anxiety disorders among Black American women's sociohistorical encounters with structural racism while living Black in America. The writer's literature review will explore single nuances to dismantle moments and movements that plague Black American communities of color. The motivation for this work is threefold: (1) As a Black American woman living in America during COVID-19, enduring stressful and socially isolated moments, I am highly observant of social phobia narratives in public spaces; (2) as an expressive art therapist graduate student, I feel that more research should focus on individuals' complicated exposure to social phobias; (3) I am a foundational Black woman reexperiencing the long-term effects of systematic humiliation of the 1960s (Du Bois, 2007), also known as systemic racism (Mental Health American, 2020), who has experienced social paranoias and prejudice. Therefore, I feel that this thesis is part of a larger journey I am conducting to reauthorize my history, as well as for the purposes of mental health awareness.

Admittedly, as an expressive art therapist, following George Floyd's death, I was impelled to think about the Black Americans' experiences during the 1930s when the flag that hung in front the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Fifth Avenue office in New York announced, "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday" (Library of Congress, 1936). There were flashbacks to and resemblance of the fight to have a voice, to be recognized,

and to be validated during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Otherwise, under these circumstances, social phobias—which are intrusive thoughts and imagery that occur consciously and cause distress (White & Holland, 2021)—of that time period are still relevant today on account of moments of multigenerational trauma and isolation during the pandemic. Considering the persistence of worries and anxieties related to being a Black American, in this paper I will investigate how a sudden violent death and traumatic events such as COVID-19 give power to social phobias and present brief intimidating thoughts that Black people—who have witnessed slavery, segregation, and abhorrence due to melanin in the skin—experience. Also, the negative impact of death amongst the Black American communities in the past year have elevated due to COVID-19 (Paredes et al., 2020).

Under policing laws, enforcement to wear a face-covering in public spaces and socially distance in public areas, along with social media broadcasting hate crimes toward people of color, feelings of loneliness have become amplified. Simultaneously, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement that became polarized during COVID-19 has contributed to the existing challenges related to mental well-being (Paredes et al., 2020). BLM signs might serve as a reminder of social phobias (Paredes et al., 2020) that coexist among African American communities, increasing the risk of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to exposure to recurring historical traumatic episodes of dysfunctional thought patterns Black Americans face daily (Farmer & Kashdan, 2015). The literature shows that African American adults have a high occurrence of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), and Panic Disorder with Agoraphobia (PDA) (Sibrava et al., 2013). Moreover, Black American women, in particular, are more likely to suffer these disorders with reoccurring traumatic history (Sibrava et al., 2013).

Social phobia issues are a comorbidity of mental health conditions that involve experiencing both characteristics of fear and behavioral conflicts for fight or flight (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Certain phobias are seldom seen in experimental research scenarios in Black American participants? (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The lack of research connected to being racially profiled in public spaces or escapism is alarming. Social phobias are short-term because of other disorders such as Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Yet systemic structural racism masks the standardized tradition of accepting that racism and being racially profiled are okay. Institutional structures that support discriminatory disadvantage towards people of color are harmful to people based on an individual's race (Health American, 2020). According to mental health research behind social phobias in Black Americans, COVID-19 significantly impacts social anxiety disorders.

The impact of COVID-19 echoes a societal flashback to racial issues due to large amounts of emotional nerve-wracking painful events faced by Black Americans under policing practices. During the summer of 1967, racial disorder broke out in Newark and Detroit causing President Lyndon Johnson to launch a profound investigation of violent racial inequality towards the Black American communities (George, 2018), the 1968 Kerner Commission Report (Humanity in Action, 2018). Consequently, as a child growing up in the sixties and visiting my grandmother in the South, at the early age of eight I can recall seeing signs saying “White only” and witnessing Black people in the streets being hosed down by water and controlled by police officers with barking dogs and police sticks beating Black American men and women. The psychophysiological stress left me shaking, depressed and polluting my childhood reality of “Blackness” (Turner et al., 2003), with social phobia thoughts.

Above all, in my inquiry, I will acknowledge the intensified moments of violence and psychological abuse in communities of color currently during COVID-19. Therefore, I will connect the social ills of anxiety disorders among Black American women and painful isolated moments that plague society's bias. I will show how the current symptoms of social phobia resonate with the xenophobic social thoughts amongst Black American communities. The research seeks to recognize the self-perceived thoughts of subconscious oppression placed on professional young Black American women today. After recontextualizing the experience of Black American women suffering from social phobia during the COVID-19 pandemic, as being part of a much larger, systemic experience of their race, I will turn to seek how expressive arts therapy can become a healing and spiritual resource in managing Black women's daily adversity and exposure to coping with systemic racism.

In this thesis, I will explore the history of Black Americans' worries in relation to policing and the social systems of oppressive approaches towards Black women's intersectionality. Despite limited research on racism and social anxiety, experiences, and influence during COVID-19 (Paredes et al., 2020), I will use Narrative Therapy to explore Black American families to personalize concerns on "systematic humiliation" (Du Bois, 2007) and develop awareness of Blackness in public spaces that externalize Black women's anxiety through expressive arts therapies. While allowing internalized thoughts to enrich cultural communication that has been denied access to share authentic moments (Klorer, 2014), this thesis will acknowledge and understand possible interventions within expressive art therapies. While conducting expressive arts therapy through narrative, it allows internalized to be enriched through cultural communication. Therapists will gain better understanding of possible

interventions within expressive arts therapies as we facilitate this modality to understand and acknowledge the social and mental experiences of Black women.

Literature Review

Overview of Black American History

The social history of Blacks in America is a forceful reminder of the toxic shadow left by an era of Jim Crow that allowed the infiltration of racial segregation to prosper in the United States. From the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, Jim Crow laws enforced Blacks and Whites to be separate in public spaces such as restrooms, pools, schools, and public drinking spaces in America (Urofsky, 2021). Jim Crow laws in America made it extremely awkward for Blacks to assemble into society as free men and women. Blacks were discriminated against in every mode of life, from schooling, dining, traveling, and employment, and injustice against Black Americans was the by-laws to normalize enslavement of African people. With Jim Crow laws in place, traveling while Black was extremely difficult. Blacks faced being socially profiled, lynched, and put in jail. Black Americans created a way to travel safely with the use of the Green Book. The Green Book was a safe travel guide for Black Americans during the Jim Crow era and was created by Victor Hugo Green (Taylor, 2020). Mr. Green published lodgings, businesses, and gas stations in the Green Book that would assist Black Americans while traveling. The Green Book became the bible for Black people traveling during Jim Crow, allowing Blacks safe passage through American highways. The Green Book was a resourceful way for Black families to drive while being Black. Not only was the Green Book liberating for Black people to be able to travel, but it was also a way to endorse other Black-owned businesses that allowed Black women to enlist their

businesses in the Green Book (Taylor, 2020), which aided in the success of Black families during a problematic era, especially for Black women in America. The Green Book demonstrates the “systemic humiliation” of Blackness as traveling through urban and rural America states that might emotionally trigger Black American uncertainties of *Driving While Black* (Taylor, 2020).

Additionally, Black families still encounter daily police brutality and systemic racism. Noticeably, Black families today have the same psychological battles. Above all, Black Lives Matter is a persona of the same “systemic humiliation” (Du Bois, 2007) that took place then and now. Certainly, according to Du Bois, double-consciousness is a theory in social philosophy referring to a source of the inward “twoness” experienced by Black Americans (Du Bois, 2007), because of Blacks’ awareness of racial oppression in a white-dominated society. *Driving while Black* is a tangible insight that Black families experience in addition to daily stressful and painful encounters with intrusive thoughts of the “twoness” in one world. As we see, today the same social phobia of being endangered within society by injustice of informative policing laws and racial profiling is defined by Blackness.

Otherwise, the notices of Black and White only signs were taken down. However, the awareness of unpleasant emotions did not eradicate the hidden reminders that Black Americans consciously acclimatized to the mass demonstrations for Black people’s civil justice. During the civil rights movement, Black Americans were underprivileged in all areas of life including employment. The civil rights movement led to the beginning of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which prohibited employment discrimination based on race, religion, sex, and the nation of origin (George, 2018). The Kerner Commission Report exposed and recognized president Lyndon B. Johnson's emotional connection to the "War on Poverty." By signing the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 – Title VII, Johnson established The

United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC; Humanity in Action, 2018). The implication of EEOC provided employment opportunities, which was a major development for Black American women.

Since Black American women were denied access of receiving equal pay wages from employment opportunities, which would have created a better quality of life due to their intersectionality of gender and Blackness, that psychologically placed a strain on Black women's identities and experiences of inequality in the socioeconomic workforce (Perry et al., 2013). Black American women benefited greatly from the implication of EEOC allowing opportunities that were once unavailable due to intersectionality. Even still, with advancements of EEOC, it is observed that Black American women are still disadvantaged in wages, housing opportunities, and status compared to White women. However, the disadvantages are unseen as the research is limited and understudied in the spectrum of Black American women (Perry et al., 2013). Opportunities for Black Americans were hindered due to years of unaddressed and organized racial tension between Blacks and Whites. The EEOC allowed for Black Americans to advance in a White-dominated society, but Black Americans still had to deal with the hidden social phobia of being Black Americans in a White-dominated society. Black Americans' experience has shaped a social phobia behavior that has festered into a mistrust and Civil Justice movement presently. Black Lives Matter is a polarized movement of Civil Justice for Black Americans fighting for inequalities and organizational systemic racism that remains a Black American issue today.

Black Americans have undergone psychophysiological enslavement, legalized segregation, and intellectual oppression within essential spectrums of life, which could lead to underlying mistrust among the Black American community. Cultural barriers and mistrust are

deemed to be the “counterintuitive” (Williams et al., 2013) reasons for the exclusion of Blacks in specified social phobia clinical research studies. Though the lack of inclusion is not clear, race may have something to do with the mistrust in government policies towards Black Americans. Blacks have a collective memory of past and present abuse among authorities (Williams et al., 2013), such as the Tuskegee study where Black males were unknowingly given Syphilis (Alsan et al., 2019). Black Americans’ “unfinished business” with their social phobias can be viewed as a lack of confidence in authorities and representatives in psychotherapy. Cultural differences could be the reason for the limited research on and the lack of interest of Black American women’s mental health issues. Considering that Black Americans' experience has created heightened anxiety levels and social paranoia in public spaces, this has created an awareness of the exclusion of Blackness.

Black Consciousness and Challenges Faced

Ultimately, Black Americans have endured many obstacles and disadvantages in navigating life as Black people, with the most disadvantaged being the Black American woman. To clarify, Black American women’s social disruptions, and namely psychosocial, means that intersectional mental health and self-care has impacted the experiences of Black American women. With limited educational, employment opportunities, segregation, and Civil Injustices, Black American women have faced multiple challenges that have caused unknown mental health issues and social phobias when seeking medical help.

Furthermore, these challenges have an unknown effect on Black America women's mental health. According to Watson et al. (2012), African American women had lower average depression and anxiety scores than White women. However, Watson et al. (2012) did not focus on social phobia among Black and White women; rather the report compared and contrasted the

socioeconomic depression and anxiety among Black and White women (Watson et al., 2012). Specifically, Thomas (2004) argued that Black women's realities do not view depression from the same lens of societal problems as White American women. Thomas continued to argue that the critical analysis of the Black women's perspective is more important than marital status, income, education, and mental health care, so the social phobia surrounding Black women issues is in need of a psychology framework that is specific to Black American women (Thomas, 2004).

Neal-Barnett and Crowther (2000) suggested that African American women being double minority status places African American women at higher risk for anxiety. Limited acknowledgements were not available on anxiety disorders among African American women. However, Neal-Barnett and Crowther (2000) stated that African American women use nontraditional methods over traditional methods to cope with mental health concerns.

The challenges faced by Black women are faced subconsciously. Few (2007) connects the creative parts of Black womanhood into living in dual realities being female and Black such as (Du Bois, 2007), "double consciousness" to Black consciousness. The critical feminist race perspectives in Few (2007) nuances to acknowledging the need to study Black families through the lens of "systemic humiliation" (Du Bois, 2007), which is caused by shameful moments of embarrassment in public spaces. The main focus of Few (2007) research was to understand the relationships between Black feminist women, and the research shows that Black American women face feelings of double consciousness, which presents mental health challenges.

Social Phobia Among Black American Women

Origins of Problems

Social phobia can show amongst American children as early as the age of eight years old (Turner et al., 2018). Generalized social phobia is one of the most common mental health issues within the public population (Turner et al., 2018). Even more concerning is the lack of research within the Black community regarding the prevalence of social anxiety disorder, especially if parents or caretakers overprotect a Black American child. For example, concerns with looking at a Black Lives Matter sign can cause intrusive thoughts that might make concerns arise about wondering why my life is threatened based on my skin color. Moreover, the flag that hung above the NAACP building can prove that Black lives are jeopardized in their environment. Du Bois (2007) depicts the double consciousness of Black lives as well as Black lives through the lens of societal problems. The behavior of an adolescent Black girl would exhibit signs of fearfulness to engage in social activities, self-isolate, struggling with the ability to negativize the environment around her. Additional research is needed to address these brief intrusive deliberations of social phobia among Black girls and women (Wards et al., 2009).

Symptoms Experienced

Sibrava et al. (2013) examined the clinical trait of Anxiety Disorders and the socioeconomic trauma history in African American adults. The two-year project consisted of 152 African American adults. During the initial intake, the individuals were diagnosed with one of the following anxiety disorders: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), or Panic Disorder Agoraphobia (PDA). The face-to-face and telephone assessment interviews were obtained by three reliable measurable questionnaires. The authors found that a higher percentage of single Black females self-reported their onset of SAD and PDA ranging from age 13 to 29, with increasing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) due to trauma history. The participants' sample of GAD ($n=94$) were higher

than SAD ($n=85$). The research reported the overall variable for lifetime treatment at intake for SAD (95.3) and PDA (93.5). GAD was more treatable than PDA, advocating that anxiety disorders, if not treated, could cause excessive fear over a lifetime and negative impact on Black American women's sociocultural experience (Sibrava et al., 2013). Although the limitation of traditional counseling theories for financially challenged Black women were essential to keep Blackness out of mainstream psychological research, it appears that panic attacks can be avoided with lifestyle changes.

Overall, Ramseyer Winter et al. (2017) discussed that Black and Latina women have a higher BMI than White women, which correlates to higher rates of mental health issues due to self-care behaviors. If Black women compared their bodies to White women's bodies, Black women would have higher levels of SAD based on these findings. Negative associations between body appreciation and depression among females have shown that these association are present in women from diverse race/ethnicity and socioeconomic groups (Ramseyer Winter et al., 2017). In contrast, self-care and mental health is critical in body consciousness to counteract negative theories that occur during depressive isolated episodes.

Although research does not show that Black American women are more likely to experience social anxiety disorders, this is due to the lack of research on this population. Research also shows that Black women are more likely to experience mental health issues due to body image and self-care.

Black American Women's Self-Perception

Ward et al (2009) studied African American Women's (AAW) beliefs about mental illness and systemic barriers by using the Common Sense Model (CSM). The CSM examined 15 AAW samples, representing three age groups: young (25-45), middle-aged (46-65), and older

(66-85). Fifty-five percent of the sample identified as middle class, and eight self-reported a mental illness diagnosis with depression. Participants chose their location for face-to-face interviews, either in their home or the office to alleviate the stress of meeting someone for the first time due to their social anxieties.

The interviews were conducted by a licensed psychologist woman of color. After completing the interview and demographic questionnaire, the participants were invited to process their reactions. Unfortunately, only one African American woman participated in the debriefing session. Nevertheless, results indicated that mental illness related to culturally specific barriers such as racism and oppression led to depressive thoughts (Ward et al., 2009) and stigmas. Further, that counseling and prayer, rather than medication, are proffered treatment options.

Black women face social phobias for a variety of reasons. Black women are intersectional. In spite of the challenges they face, Black women found ways to overcome the continuous tribulation that takes place with being Black in America daily. Additionally, the YWCA assisted with the aid of Black women finding employment and assisted Black women with their presentation in society further strengthened the fact that Black women faced double adversities and faced social phobias yet brilliantly found ways to overcome burdens that considerably could have defeated Black women. Nonetheless, the counseling field needs to pay attention to and expand the treatment options for Black American women who face social phobias.

Treatment Options

The aloneness of a Black woman is trapped in a history of sorrow where the Black woman discovers peace with self-love and is no-longer trapped in negative thoughts of Blackness. This section explores various treatment options for this population and ends with a

description of how expressive therapies, including narrative therapy, can be used to treat social phobias for Black American women.

Bechtel et al.'s (2020) arts-based research examined the encounters with body images and the weakened voices of social change with tape sculptures. These life-size sculptures became containers for art and drama therapies, equally holding a therapeutic connection between space and form. The art-making process gave structure to negative body images relating to survival trauma and personal narratives concerning individuals' social challenges in public spaces. The creative arts therapy practice was an eight-hour workshop designed to advocate for alternative healing and support social change. The method included the systematic use of clear heavy-duty tape and bandage scissors to examine body image experience. The groups consisted of four participants who casted one section of each participant's body parts to create a group life-size sculpture. The installation process was conducted in a public space, accompanying a large sheet of paper hung with life-size sculptures to collect participants' thoughts as data. Therefore, the workshop bridged art and drama therapy, redefining the personal narrative for participation in public view. The participants responded positively toward acknowledging their past trauma and discovered a new relationship with body empowerment experiences sharing moments of growth. The life-size sculptures to be the process that facilitated narratives for cultural, social change in alternative healing practices it explores issues of oppressive systems that focuses on processing new narratives for expressive arts therapies.

When expressive art therapists conduct interventions for Black women diagnosed with GAD and SAD, consideration should be made as to the relevant factors surrounding Black women's lives. For example, Black women's inclusion in the workplace has caused additional stressors that have gone unrecorded. Such as being excluded, low self-esteem, moments of

isolation due to the lack of representation, and experience of rejection. Furthermore, The Kerner Commission Report (Humanity in Action, 2018) addresses many of the lack of opportunities for Blacks here and now and the contrast between the lives of Blacks and Whites in America.

In the event, Farmer and Kashdan (2015) examined how individuals behave under stress and how they hold those emotions, studying the relationship between participants with SAD and a control group. The authors found that based on the daily entries of the participants with SAD had a higher chance of carrying feelings of rejection in their work relationships into the following day. The people in the healthy control groups were able to regulate those negative emotions of exclusion and accepting adversity during a social event. They also found that people who have SAD avoid putting themselves in stressful situations. Black women, experience higher levels of stress being of the lowest socioeconomic class, however, this demographic remains unnoticed in the literature. This qualitative design was not reliable for its construct validity of the representations of Black women well-being. Farmer and Kashdan (2015) study is one example of how past researchers did not acknowledged the women to be culturally witnessed and valued, sharing their faith in communities that understand what it is to be a woman of color expressing mental health vulnerabilities in a safe space which highlights the importance of well-being.

Findings have shown that African American have lower rates of anxiety compared to other higher socioeconomic classes (Williams et al., 2013). Blacks unaddressed social phobia can be viewed as a lack of confidence in the psychology field. It has been considered that African American are at a lower rate of anxiety as they are not accurately identified based on the Black experience. Blacks are more likely to confide in close friends and family rather than sharing information with those outside of close friends and family. Mistrust can manifest as the

unwillingness to speak with others however the reason it is not entirely clear (Williams et al., 2013).

The reliability on baseline data questionnaire and participants self-reporting sample of trauma: events, experience, and their effects consistency to the external validity. Furthering the understanding of mental health effects on Black women globally. The demographic and clinical characteristics reveal that American women population samples between the ages of 13- 29 could have reoccurring social anxiety issues. Workplace anxiety issues are an aspect that the Kerner Commission Report (Humanity in Action, 2018) addresses.

Although Intersectionality Theory (IT) brings attention to new ways of thinking about privilege, oppression, and power, it seems that mental health issues for Africa American women seek help from sources other than traditional mental health institutions (Neal-Barnett & Crowther, 2000). The literature points out that African American women opted for seeking help from nontraditional sources and resources within their community (Neal-Barnett & Crowther, 2000,) because of the lack of access before COVID-19 health care for Black women dealing with isolated anxiety disorders, the study has a number of significant limitations (Paredes et al., 2021).

It has been noticed that Black American women of socioeconomic status and race have resulted in less involvement in self-care practices. Additional research and cross-cultural focus solution intervention should aid all mental health approaches for an alternative measure to save lives impacted by systematic, institutionalized racism and sexism.

Ramseyer Winter et al. (2017) explored correlates between body appreciation and mental health issues among women's socioeconomic status and race. Society has portrayed Black women as promiscuous, aggressive, overweight, uneducated, and below Western standards.

Ramseyer, Winter et al., 2017 show that better body appreciation was significantly associated with indicators of better mental health. Ideally, the opposition should be argued, that lower body appreciation was significantly associated with indicators of lower mental health. Thus arguing that Black women's body appreciation is correlated to mental health.

In regards to correlation between body appreciation and mental health issues, among many play a role as to why Black American women are less involved with the expression of self-care. Additionally, it is thought to be the reason Black American women have higher levels of mental health issues however limited research has been collected regarding the matter.

Mental health professionals should provide further education on mindfulness and self-care awareness, the use of these methods is looked to be a current treatment option that is utilized in the mental health care field.

Expressive Art Therapy and Narrative Therapy

Expressive Arts Therapy serves as an intermodal professional counseling collective in movement, music, poetry, writing, and "active imagination" inspired by the unconscious mind's endless possibilities conveyed through consciousness (Levine et al., 1999). The invigorating modalities used by expressive arts therapists include expressive writing, artmaking while listening to music, and creating a playlist for improving negative thoughts. In addition, the expressive writing intervention allows Black American women to narrate their journey in coping with negative thoughts of racial inequality, stress, and despondency placed upon African American women (Kilgore et al., 2020). The writer believes expressive arts therapies would benefit Black American women, allowing free-thinking voices to uplift Black America's women adversities and the first steps towards diagnosis, treatment, and intervention dealing with social anxiety.

The primary use of both expressive arts and narrative therapy on Black American women's mental health could be used for the purpose of creating better techniques to address the issues of dual realities within the Black woman experience. Expressive arts practices would allow Black American women to tell their story at ease, rather than a more confrontational, verbal approach. Specifically, the purpose could aid expressive art therapists with the needed background of the experience of the potential clients. Largely, literature regarding the matter missed highlighting the potential gains from the research, which remains limited. The increased research would aid the advancement of Blacks and provide the insight needed for mental health providers to be assets to clients from Black communities. (Baştemur, & Baş, 2021).

Due to such limited representation, the experience of Black American women who undergo stressful, painful social interactions in public spaces is under shared due to societal oppression. Narrative therapy would allow for healing to occur so that Black American women's stories can be expressed, providing the women with a sense of relief and reflection. The inclusion of art practices in the externalization process helps the client separate the issue and the self by objectifying it (Baştemur, & Baş, 2021). Based on the history of Black American women, it may not be easy to discuss specific topics, experiences, or matters.

The use of personal narrative would support the creation of more significant literature in the spectrum of Black women and Black families while viewing Black women and families' experiences, rather than continuing to enforce the normativity of Whiteness. Additionally, with such limited research focused on Black women and Black families, Few (2007) encourages non-Black family scholars to further examine Black women and families for the use of determining norms and context. Since limited research is available on the mental health of Blacks, it allows for further research to be done. Mental health providers and researchers can create inventive

ways to record and document data about Blacks. The inclusion of Black American women in studies and research would be a step in the needed direction for Mental health providers, researchers, and the mental health field.

Klorer (2014) found that narrative therapy allows the expression of oneself and brings an awareness to the double consciousness within societal problems, which has historically affected the Black experience. In addition, the use of writing within narrative therapy can be used to cope with the intersectionality that Black women face daily (Kilgore et al., 2020). It seems that narrative therapy has the ability to bridge the gap within the working relationships between expressive art therapists and Black women clients.

One popular method for working with anxieties is emotion-focused therapy (EFT) (Timulak et al., 2017). However, with the mistrust of authorities within the psychology field, it seems that black communities would benefit from narrative therapy more than emotion-focused therapy (EFT). According to Timulak et al. (2017), Emotion-Focused Therapy emphasizes the feeling of awareness, acceptance, expression, utilization, regulation, and transformation of emotion and corrective emotional experience with the therapist. Both EFT and narrative therapy have varying advantages and disadvantages. Narrative therapy is different than EFT, because it allows the client to separate themselves from their problems and enables them to express themselves while voicing the Black experience. Narrative therapy doesn't focus on the diagnosis itself, while EFT is tackling the pressing emotion in that moment. Furthermore, almost all EFT clients in this study saw this type of work to be complex and difficult, as did the EFT therapists (Timulak et al., 2017).

In regard to narrative therapy, there are four basic concepts suggested: life, language, dominant stories, and externalization (Baştemur, & Baş, 2021). The use of dominant stories and

externalization would help treat Black American women in a narrative therapy session. The third fundamental concept, dominant stories, allows individuals to express and tell their story to focus on therapy and create their narration. Conversely, the last concept of narrative therapy is externalization, which addresses the individual as not the issue at hand, and that the subject itself is the problem (Baştemur, & Baş, 2021). With that being the case, Black American women would benefit from creating a positive dialogue through this method, as it would separate the client from the external problem and address it accordingly. In the example of Klorer (2014), who found societal problems within his investigation of a housing law concerning a family of color living in a White community, Klorer aimed to facilitate narrative therapy that linked artwork to institutional racism. While the particular method influenced the session, the bond created between the client and therapist was equally as important. The use of dominant stories and externalization regarding narrative therapy should be utilized to heal and reflect Black American women. Narrative therapy would allow for the Black American woman to tell her story in her way and identify the problem, separating it from herself, and addressing the overall issue.

Conclusion

The social phobias concerning mental health care, in question, is limited regarding Black American women's viewpoints. According to current research, Blacks appears to be at low risk for GAD, SAD and social phobia. However, more research is needed to better analyze African American women's well-being, in which is grounded in bigotry and needs to be unmasked in the therapeutic process.

The overall strength within the literature review is the ability to crystalize the flaws and acknowledge the underexposure of research available about Black American women's mental

health self-care. Indeed, the awareness of mental health issues affecting Black American communities would improve Black American women's experiences in America. With the expectation that more resources would encourage the correction of mental health care and provide more significant resources to assist the Black American families.

The literature has shown weakness in the amount of research available for anxiety, fear, and social phobias among Black American women. There is a need for additional research to strengthen the studies and create assessment and treatment specifically to Black women overall wellness, as most of the literature has shown the need for more significant research studies on social inclusion.

The literature addresses the lack of research available considering Blacks and mental health; however, it misses the point of who would conduct the needed research. Research in some cases or on a large scale requires time and funds. Without either, it is quite challenging to research Black women and mental health awareness. Many of the literature left out interested in exploring Blacks and mental health, specifically Black women's mental health.

Considerably, Blacks are understudied and undertreated due to unknown reasons. Therefore, a diverse group of researchers is needed to understand the Blacks' experience better. The following steps for research would be to do more footwork to why Blacks distrust authority and mental health care providers and create greater research incentive.

Black American women have gone undertreated, under record, unnoticed in regard to mental health care. The limited data has left them out where Black American women should be placed. Mental Health affects all; Blacks Americans are not the exception. More significant research would aid in creating better-addressed plans to assist with mental health regarding Blacks.

Additionally, my thesis argues that narrative and expressive art therapy would be ideal for addressing Black American women's mental health matters. It would allow the Black American woman to share her sociohistorical events and witness Blackness in its authentic form. Narrative therapy will assist with the healing process and the mental health care of Black American women, and the implementation of self-care. I believe that self-care such as meditation, exercising, and taking care of oneself can relieve mental health disorders suffered by Black American women.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Expressive Arts Therapy**

Student's Name: Sharon Cropper

Type of Project: Thesis

Title: Unmasking Racism Through Expressive Arts Therapy with Black American Women: A

Literature Review

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

Thesis Advisor: Dr Tamar Hadar, MT-BC