

# *I'm So Fancy: Counseling African American Girls*

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## **I. Introduction**

What do you know about AA girls?

What do you know about counseling AA girls?

What are your experiences with counseling AA girls?

## **II. The Development of AA girls**

### **(Sanders & Bradley, 2005)**

Questioned the appropriateness of developmental theories for AA

*Physically* it is not unusual for AA girls to compare themselves to White girls. Some AA girls will create their own style that seems over the top.

*Social and social status* is extremely important to AA girls. Popularity comes from the number of followers, tweets, retweets, likes, etc. Students are easily distracted by talk of fashion and the entertainment community. Belonging to the "right" crowd is more dependent on how students view each other than how one views self. This may cause students to behave how they believe others want them to, and not as their authentic selves. Trying to belong may trump other areas such as academics.

*Cognitive* as AA girls become more capable of abstract thought, they gain an awareness to the world around them. It can be a shock for AA girls that not everyone is accepting or them.

*Racial Identity* AA girls must sort out how to be themselves while living in a culture that values White as good. AA girls may distrust others. Being loud and confrontational is viewed as a means for AA girls to make their own imprint. They may fight against the dominant view and speak with their entire body. Counselor should be prepared to openly discuss racial issues with AA girls.

*Sexism* AA girls are exposed early on the images and message about sexual development and expression. As their bodies develop it can be difficult for AA girls to make sense of how they fit it and how to manage hormones. AA girls may struggle with the differences between sex and love.

*Relational Aggression* (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005) is a part of gender development. It involves gossiping, name-calling, backbiting, manipulating other girls, pretending to be friends (friendly bobbing), and exclusion. This is a method in which many girls handle conflict.

At every level AA girls must learn to deal with the insecurities, negative images, their own cultural norms, and the norms of dominant culture

### III. How can we facilitate a helping relationship with AA girls?

*Counselor-Awareness & Transparency.* Be aware of the layers of distrust and be willing to explore those issues openly. Self-disclosure is highly valued with AA girls. Colorblind-ness is not the answer -- it may be more helpful to acknowledge counselor/client differences than to ignore them.

*Selection of Theory.* Be aware of the cultural and linguistic factors. Choose a theory that respects the values and dignity of the client. For example, relational cultural theory may be more appropriate.

*Embrace resistance.* Take resistance as the need to know the client better and respect the culture of *minding your own business*.

*Probe with caution.* Some AA girls have been instructed not to tell personal and family business. Too many questions in the beginning is seen as intrusive.

*Differences among AA girls.* Not all AA girls are alike. Get to know how they are and are not like other girls.

*Know the culture* or ask about the culture. Spirituality and religion are big parts of African American culture and is an important coping method. Family should be the first source of counseling for AA: due to the "What happens in my house stays in my house" value.

*Know the language*

<b>Friendly bobbing</b>	Pretending to be friends then talking about someone behind their back
<b>Tbh</b>	To be honest
<b>On fleek/ lit</b>	Usually refers to hair, eyebrows, appearance, etc. that is looks really nice
<b>Thirsty</b>	Desperate especially for attention
<b>Swag</b>	To have style that other kids want or like
<b>Agg</b>	Aggravating
<b>On blast</b>	Embarrassing someone
<b>Loud and common</b>	Loud and bring negative attention to themselves
<b>Squad</b>	Group of close friends
<b>Poppin</b>	Popular, cool, your name is not known

#### **IV. What are some helpful theories and techniques?**

- Relational Cultural Theory
  - Connections/Relationships
  - Useful for non-dominant populations
  - Looks at behavior and outcome in terms of connectedness/isolation
  - Responsive counselor w/mutual empathy
  - Allow the client to have a voice
  
- Family Systems Theory
  
- CBT
  - Focus on observable measures leads to less bias
  - Collaborative. Client can share his or her own expertise
  - Emphasis on empowerment and control
  
- Gestalt
  - Empty chair/ Outside the door.

#### **V. Doing something different in counseling**

- Bag of Tricks
  - Small talk
  - Social media
  - Comedy, be silly
  - Hair, makeup, fashion
  - Music, YouTube, dancing
  - Use a whiteboard
  - Play dumb/ One down from Strategic
  - Computers, cell phones
  - Birthday wishes
  - Games

#### **VI. What do AA girls really want in terms of counseling?**

- Access to quality services
- Never judgmental
- Supportive counseling
- Fair treatment as any other group or population
- For others to get to know them
- Deep conversation
- Genuine reactions
- Understanding of issues unique to African Americans

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