Attachment THAIRapy

A culturally relevant treatment paradigm for Black foster youth

Academic/Community Partnership

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The Population

African American/Black foster youth

The Problem

1. Disproportionality and Disparity

The **color** of foster care

- Black children are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system

- Black children represent 7% of the total child population in California but account for 30% of children in foster care (Children's Defense Fund, 2011; www.fostercaremonth.org, 2006)

- Black children enter foster care more frequently, stay in care longer, have more placements/moves, receive less services and are slower to exit foster care when compared with Caucasian youth and families (www.cssp.org, 2006)

Disproportionality vs. Disparity

Casey-CSSP Alliance for Racial Equity in the Child Welfare System, 2006

- **Disproportionality** - over- or underrepresentation in the child welfare system relative to proportion in the census population

- **Disparity** – treatment inequities of minority children and families in the child welfare system compared to white children and families

- Research shows that children of color in foster care receive **different** and **substandard** treatment as compared with white children in the system
  - Fewer African American children receive mental health services even though the need for this type of service may be as great (or greater)

The Problem

2. Attachment deficits

Impact of foster care placement

- Family and environmental context
  - Abuse
  - Neglect
  - Trauma

- Challenges
  - Neurological
  - Emotional
  - Developmental
  - Behavioral
  - **Attachment**

- **Multiple moves and losses exacerbate the problem(s)**

Healthy attachment

Caregivers responses allow children to

- Feel confident their needs will be met
- Can rely on caregivers in times of stress
- Learn to self regulate affect
- Self soothe

Development of internal working models of attachment

- Guide future interactions
- New interpersonal interactions are stored and interpreted according to current representation

Services traditionally offered to foster care population

Mental Health	Health care	Educational
Independent Living	Financial support	Permanency planning

Where are the services to address the baggage from attachment related deficits?

The Problem

3. Lack of culturally relevant treatment paradigms

Lack of efficacy of traditional models

- Stigma
- Distrust
  - Tuskegee
  - Henrietta Lacks
  - Elaine Riddick
- Communication
  - Verbal and nonverbal differences
  - Resistance vs. symptoms
- Underrepresented in research
- Cultural sensitivity vs. cultural competence vs. cultural humility

Needs

Ongoing opportunities to meet attachment needs for foster youth

Culturally relevant evidenced based research and practice

Buy in by African American clients

Creativity – with triple minority population

- Culturally competent practice
- Social justice issues

Why hair?

The significance of hair for black women

Historical context

- Slavery
  - Miscegenation
  - Differences in hair, skin color, facial features
    - Immediately obvious characteristics used to discriminate and make distinctions

Ramifications

Differences in hair, skin color, features

- Dehumanizing qualities
- Intergenerational cultural beliefs
- Stereotypes

Standards of beauty

Unattainable standards of femininity for Black women

The role of skin color, facial features and hair

Taboo

- Unspoken "family secrets"
- Especially not to be communicated with White people (Russell, Wilson & Hall, 1992)

Rare inclusion in traditional psychology, social work and related disciplines

From perception to internalization

Perceived self worth, intelligence, success and attractiveness have a relationship to features

Often described as "good" or "bad"

Internalization of dominant Eurocentric notions of beauty often leads to lowered self esteem and self denigration (Byrd & Solomon, 2005)

Manifested as **self hate, rage, powerlessness, feelings of inferiority**

Black women and hair

- Conflict between self concept and standards of beauty
  - Beauty, femininity
  - Sociopolitical statement
- Black hair characteristics
  - Fragility
  - Style requirements
- Black beauty parlors, salons and kitchens as important social centers

- Multi-million dollar industry
  - Good Hair

Hair care for Black children

- Time investment
- Value
- Financial investment

Groomed = loved

Touch

- Can foster positive connection and nurturing
- Source of painful, abusive interpersonal interactions

- Attachment
- Cultural or ethnic pride and identity
- Sense of self worth, importance, value

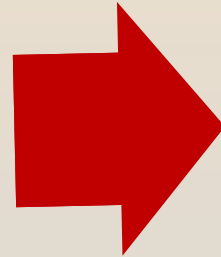**Fosters**

Hair care as a context and vehicle

- Attachment
- Self esteem
- Racial conflicts
- Treatment interest

The Model

Attachment t**HAIR**apy

Evidence based support

Lewis (1999) pilot study examining African American mother/daughter dyads

Utilized hair combing as a context for the study of

- Assessing strategies for racial and gender socialization of children
- Evolving mother/child relationships
- Formation of internal working models of attachment relationships

Functional aspects of hair combing offer opportunity for attachment and intense emotional intimacy

- Opportunity for healing interpersonal interaction
- Room for shifting of internal working models

The Pilot Study

December 2011 to February 2012

9 Black youth aged 10-17

Sample of convenience of foster families volunteering to participate

10 total sessions

- Odd weeks - Attachment tHAIRapy sessions focused on topics including: Empathy, Intergenerational communication, Racial acceptance/rejection, Touch and Attachment
- Even weeks - Traditional therapy sessions focused on processing Attachment tHAIRapy sessions and progress towards goals

Mixed methods research design

Pre and Posttest surveys

- Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (youth only)
- Social Provisions Scale (youth only)
- Parent Questionnaire (caregiver/parent only)
- Assessment Checklist for Children (ACC) (caregiver/parent)
- Behavior Assessment for Children of African Heritage -BACAH (youth and caregiver/parent)

Youth interview (pre and post)

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic Coding and Content Analysis

- Feelings about foster care
- Significant relationships
- Feelings about therapy
- Feelings about hair
- Racial identity development

Pilot data indicated:

100% of the participants reported dissatisfaction with their hair and a desire for "different" hair

- Damage and breakage due to over processing
- Weaves highest preference

Intervention offered a vehicle for improved communication between participants and parents AND participants and others

- Depth of content
- Process (choice, voice)
- Touch as a factor in comfort, vulnerability

Participants reported improved self esteem

- Professionalism a factor
- Perceived stigma of foster care

Ambivalence regarding attachment for many youth

tHAIRapy Video

tHAIRapy version 2.0+

- Due to high interest in project, Star View expanded research study to a program
- Pilot data was analyzed to develop an article (Journal of Black Studies, 2015)
  - Relationship between research and practice
- Additional components added to include cultural elements
  - Natural hair care, education
- Transition
  - Parent involvement as appropriate
  - Self expression
    - Vehicle for integration of attachment relationships outside of primary caretaker AND address deeper issues

The Therapeutic Experience

- The Staff Experience
  - Candace McIntosh
  - Paulette Edwards
  - Yolanda Dees
- The Caregiver Experience
- Hair Stylist Experience
- The Youth's Experience

Challenges and limitations
Lessons learned

- Residence vs. family
  - Space
  - Time
  - Caregiver involvement
- Diagnoses
- Level of acuity of population
  - Primary needs supersede hair care
  - Risk factors
- Scheduling and consistency
- Attachment vs. self esteem
- Implications regarding natural hair and cultural identity

Q & A

Thank you!!

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