



American Counseling Association

# School Counselor Connection

## Cultural Mistrust in Counseling

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In the U.S. education system, the expanding responsibilities of school counselors have created unique challenges toward serving students of color, specifically African Americans. Based on the 2007–2017: Demographics of the U.S. Psychology Workforce Report, White Americans who are in the active psychology workforce make up roughly 83.6% of the occupation, making it highly probable that they will interact with students of color, specifically African American students throughout their career. While prejudice and discrimination may not be a motivating factor or intention of the ethically practicing counselor, there are cultural nuances present that can stymie “trust,” a key element in the counselor-counselee relationship. Due to both direct and indirect acts of discrimination against African Americans by White Americans in the United States, African Americans have been predisposed to develop an adaptive attitudinal disposition that is suspicious and guarded toward White Americans (Bell & Tracey, 2006). This is known as cultural mistrust. In an effort to bring awareness to cultural mistrust and the role it plays in the mental health and therapeutic process for African American students, information is provided to assist counselors-in-training, counselor educators, and specifically school counselors in their effort to construct strong therapeutic alliances despite differences in the counselor-counselee backgrounds. Information listed below was influenced by an article by Cabral & Smith (2011) titled *Racial/ethnic matching of clients and therapists in mental health services: A meta-analytic review of preferences, perceptions, and outcomes*, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58, 537-554.

### 5 Questions that can help shape counselors' questions in addressing cultural differences within the counseling encounter.

- What was it like to grow up in your family and how has it shaped your views on counseling?
- Have you ever been treated poorly because of your beliefs, ethnicity, race, etc. and what are some ways that you have been poorly treated?
- What are some incorrect cultural assumptions people have made about you that have caused problems?
- When there are troubles in your family and needs in your family, what do you do and who do you turn to?
- Do you have any questions for me about counseling?

### Ways to increase your cultural capital and incorporate culturally sensitive practices into your approach

- Continued education/trainings to become competent with the Black experience
- While interpreting outcomes and during the therapeutic relationship, understand the mistrust levels that may influence outcomes.
- Note any outward apprehension
- Be aware of your own cultural biases
- Acknowledge racism as a real issue Black people face
- Recognize that every client will require their own specific therapeutic approach.

### References

Bell, T. J., & Tracey, T. J. G. (2006). The relation of cultural mistrust and psychological health. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 34(1), 2-14. 192  
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