Historically, ethnic minorities have been represented at the bottom of the economic and social order putting minority children and adolescents particularly at risk for psychological disorders and behavioral problems. As the population of minority youth increases it becomes clear that there is a need for educational and therapeutic interventions that are culturally relevant for this population. Minority families often exert strong pressures on members not to reveal personal matters to "strangers" or to "outsiders." It has been suggested that the therapeutic tool of bibliotherapy be considered an innovative approach for working with children who may perceive "talk therapy" as threatening. When using bibliotherapy with minority clients, it is necessary to select culturally relevant books that reflect the reader's experiences and provide models that promote identification. Providing books that reflect a child's worldview, similar family structures, environments, and language, and that portray ethnic pride will assist in providing culturally sensitive bibliotherapy. The counselor can use bibliotherapy in individual or group settings. Books can help children cope with many of life's problems. Through bibliotherapy, readers can see themselves as aligned with characters, situations, and experiences that give them a sense they are not alone. (A list of books which focuses on African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic ethnic/racial groups is included. Approximate reading levels by age are noted with key descriptors of the subject.) (ABL)
Culturally Relevant Bibliotherapy: Meeting the Needs of Minority Children

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Abstract

This article presents how bibliotherapy can be a culturally sensitive therapeutic tool to use with children of color. A brief description of the stages of bibliotherapy are discussed. Examples of using culturally relevant literature are provided and a reference list of books categorized by ethnicity.
Over the last several decades, the United States has witnessed a dramatic change in the cultural diversity of our population. The U.S. Census Bureau (1987) has reported that non-White youth (African Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Hispanics) under the age of 18 will constitute 30% of the nation’s population by the year 2000 and 38% by the year 2020. A study conducted by the College Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, estimated that one-third of the U.S. public school students will be from minority groups by 1995 (Denver Post, 1991).

Minority Children at Risk

The Children’s Defense Fund (1987) noted that ethnic minority children are greatly disadvantaged by their ethnicity, poverty, and social isolation. Historically, ethnic minorities have been represented at the bottom of the economic and social order putting minority children and adolescents particularly at risk for psychological disorders and behavioral problems. (Ho, 1992; Gibbs & Huang, 1989). Brounstein, Hatry, Altschuler, and Blair (1990) stated that urban youth live in the midst of what has been named social stress, inner city stress, and environmental stress. The problems related to these types of stress are poverty, powerlessness, inadequate housing, poor
health, lack of access to mental health services, school dropout, and discrimination.

As the population of minority youth increases it becomes clear that there is a need for educational and therapeutic interventions that are culturally relevant for this population. The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, to briefly discuss the influence of ethnicity on one's worldview. Second, to provide an overview of the goals of bibliotherapy and how this therapeutic tool can be culturally relevant with children of color. Third, to provide a reference list of books that focuses on four racial/ethnic groups; African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. In reviewing the literature on bibliotherapy and examining suggested books, it became apparent the majority of selected references depicted the majority Anglo culture. Hence, the need to compile a list of culturally relevant books. The reference list was compiled by reviewing books at libraries, bookstores, and reference guides such as the Bookfinder (Spredemann, 1981). The books listed cover an array of issues to assist the counselor in meeting the individual needs of minority clients.

The Influence of Ethnicity

Ho (1992) stated that one's ethnicity influences the
manifestation of symptoms, coping mechanisms, and defensive styles. "Not only are children growing up in minority families exposed to different family structures and dynamics, school and neighborhood experiences, and community responses than children from mainstream Anglo families, but they also must cope with socioeconomic realities and barriers that profoundly limit their opportunities and negatively affect their normal development and mental health" (p. 8).

Minority families often exert strong pressures or members not to reveal personal matters to "strangers" or "outsiders". Children may feel they will shame, stigmatize, or violate family ethics if they open up and discuss family matters. (Sue & Sue, 1991). When working with children who may perceive the use of "talk therapy" for assessment and treatment as threatening, Pardeck (1990) suggested that the therapeutic tool of bibliotherapy be considered as an innovative approach. When using bibliotherapy with minority clients, it is necessary to select culturally relevant books that reflect the reader's experiences and provide models that promote identification. Although the problems that minority and Anglo children are experiencing may be categorized similarly (e.g., self-esteem, divorce, death, sibling relationships, peer pressure, etc.), how
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one perceives and manages problems through his or her worldview may be drastically different. As previously stated, ethnicity greatly influences how one thinks, copes, feels about life, death, physical, and mental illness. Within the worldview of minority children, oppression, discrimination, prejudice, and racism often complicate ones' ability not only to change situations, but also decrease self-worth and self-esteem. Hence, providing books that reflect a child's worldview, similar family structures, environments, language, and portray ethnic pride will assist in providing culturally sensitive bibliotherapy.

Goals of Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy is defined in the Dictionary of Education as "the use of books to influence total development, a process of interaction between the reader and literature which is used for personality assessment, adjustment, growth, clinical and mental hygiene purposes; a concept that ideas inherent in selected reading material can have a therapeutic effect upon the mental or physical ills of the reader" (Good 1966, p.212).

The goals of bibliotherapy have been linked to the interdependent stages of psychotherapy (Bernstein & Rudman, 1989; Manning & Casbergue, 1988; Pardeck & Pardeck, 1984). In the first stage of identification, the reader identifies with the
character in a book who is experiencing similar problems. In the second stage, projection, the reader connects the character with his or her own emotions and meanings. Catharsis occurs in the third stage when the reader experiences an emotional release as the character of the story resolves a difficult situation. The final stage in this process is insight and integration. The reader gains personal insight into a problem and internalizes some of the coping behaviors of the character in the book.

To accomplish these goals, it is most important to select books that act as a mirror—reflecting and validating familiar cultures and experiences (Cox & Galda, 1990). Children need the opportunity to see themselves in their books.

Using Culturally Relevant Books

The counselor can use bibliotherapy in individual or group settings. In either situation, the counselor needs to select a book that presents a problem similar to that of the individual or group. In addition, the book should be age and reading level appropriate (Pardeck, 1990). The counselor can then initiate discussion of the topic and read a brief book or have the individual or group read a book before the session for reaction and discussion (Gladding & Gladding, 1991).

If the counselor is working with an African American student
or a group of African American students who are experiencing problems related to school, the book Sometimes I Don't Like School (Hogan, 1980), can assist in looking at how George uses avoidance tactics to deal with difficulties at school. George is African American and the pictures show ethnically diverse classmates and teachers. He eventually resolves his problem with the help of a teacher and parent. The counselor can initiate a discussion on the difficulties the student/s may be having similar to George and how they deal with those situations. Brainstorming can follow the discussion to explore other options for dealing with difficult school problems.

Children of color in a predominately white school may experience prejudicial and racial remarks. They may feel isolated not fitting the "norm" of the school resulting in lowered self-esteem and possibly repressed anger. We Adopted You, Benjamin Koo (Girard, 1989) is the story of a Korean boy who was adopted into an American family. The story depicts his experiences of not only being adopted and not knowing his real mother, but also being culturally different. In the story Benjamin states, "I do have one problem. A few kids call me "Chink"....I don't like him I heard a girl say, he's Japanese. It hurts me when kids tease me or talk about me like I'm an alien
from the moon". Even though Ben has assimilated into the majority culture, he still experiences the hurt of being "different". Ben shares his feelings and the way he copes with racism which may assist other children of color in dealing with being culturally different than the majority.

Children who are new to the United States and still very traditional in their culture may not only experience prejudice but also the difficulty of fitting into two different cultures. Studies have indicated that relocation can be very stressful for children (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Hisama, 1980). Berry (1980) referred to this stress as "acculturative stress". Ho (1992) has suggested that relocation may exacerbate conflicts related to normal development; such as self-concept, identity conflicts, and independence.

Sundara, a Cambodian refugee, is the main character in Children of the River (Crew, 1989). She has been relocated to Oregon, leaving her parents, brother, and sister behind. Living with her traditional Cambodian aunt, Sundara struggles to fit into school and be a "good Cambodian girl"—one who never dates and waits for her family to arrange her future marriage. The story presents insight into the emotional difficulties of life between two cultures. It is important that the counselor
understand the cultural values, belief systems, and societal norms of Asian traditional culture (Ho, 1992) to assist children in adapting to a new culture while maintaining their cultures of origin.

A societal problem that occurs across all ethnic, socioeconomic, and family types is child abuse. Barth and Derezotes (1990), however, found that it is unevenly distributed across places and populations. Families and children suffering the most social strain are most likely to suffer abuse.

Pardeck (1990) indicated that abused children often have difficulty developing relationships and feel threatened to verbally discuss their situations. Using a book such as Jason's Story: Going to a Foster Home (Anderson & Finnes, 1986), may illicit emotional responses from the abused child that can be discussed with a counselor or expressed through art, drama, or play. Jason was removed from his mother's home after Social Services investigated reported bruises on Jason. "He mother had lost her job and was drinking heavily. "Jason believed he was a bad boy. He thought that his mother believed he was bad too". This book, about a young African American boy, not only presents a home under stress but also the emotions, feelings, and behaviors related to that stress. The book explains what foster
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Care is and provides a glossary of words for children to know in those situations.

Conclusion

Books can help children cope with many of life's problems. Bernstein and Rudman (1989) stated that people are said to identify when they behave or imagine themselves behaving like other individuals with whom they have made a connection. Through bibliotherapy, readers can see themselves as aligned with characters, situations, and experiences that give them a sense they are not alone. Bibliotherapy exists as a tool to be used in the therapy process.

The following list of books has been compiled to focus on four racial/ethnic groups; African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic. They represent a wide range of issues being faced by children of various ages. To assist the counselor with book selection, an approximate reading level by age is noted along with key descriptors of the subject.
African American:


Childress, Alice (1973). *A hero ain't nothing but a sandwich.* Avon Books. Drugs. 9-12


Clifton, Lucille (1975). *My brothers fine with me.* Holt, Reinhart, & Winston. Siblings, running away, African-
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American dialect. 5-7.


Insecurity, self confidence through friendship. 9-12.


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Tate, Eleanora (1990). *Thank you, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* Bantam Skylark. Identity, Black pride. 9-12.


**American Indian:**


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Cone, Molly (1972). *Number four.* Brothers death, Indian identity. 10-12.


Griese, Arnold Alfred (1978). *The wind is not the river.* Expectations of others, fear, values. 9-12.

Death, loneliness, prejudice. 9-12.


**Asian:**


**Hispanic:**

Colman, Hila Crayder (1975). *That's the way it is, amigo.* Crowell, Inc. Father's death, running away, friendship. 9-11.


References


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