Mental Health

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Read This If You're Hesitant to Try Therapy

Why therapy? What is the purpose of therapy? Does therapy work? Those are some of the questions that I've been asked throughout my career, and honestly, those are the same questions that I've asked myself prior to becoming a therapist. To be frank, these are the same questions that I asked myself as a person who has gone to therapy. It can feel strange and daunting to speak to a stranger about your problems, especially when you are a person of color. In some circles, going to therapy is still taboo. My goal is to share my experience as a therapist, but also as someone who has attended therapy. I hope by sharing my experience I can shed light on therapy and how it can benefit everyone.

My experience with therapy actually started in 2008. I was 19 years old, and it was one of the first times that I could remember that something felt off. I could recall being tearful most of the time, and I was isolating myself from my friends. I was also barely sleeping. I remember telling my mother about how I was feeling, and she told me all I needed to do was pray and God would heal me. So I started praying and praying, and nothing was happening. I started to think God didn't care about how I was feeling because I still felt off. I told myself I needed to talk to someone because this feeling was agonizing. I knew I couldn't talk to my parents because you know immigrant parents. I did not want to burden my friends, because I was always the "strong friend".

As days and weeks went by, the feelings persisted and I could barely get out of bed. I remember one of my classmates talking about the counseling center on campus, so I decided that I needed to go. So I made an appointment and did not tell anyone. To this day, no one knew that I went until now. I remember sitting in the waiting room and thinking, *what am I doing here? Black people don't go to therapy*. When the therapist walked out and called my name, I was face to face with an older white man. The first thing that popped into my head was, "Oh boy."

Once we got into the room and he asked me what brought me to therapy, it was like I finally had permission to let my guard down. Here I was, spilling my guts out to this white man. I was allotted five more sessions after my first, and I went to everyone. I would anticipate every session and cherish the time that I had to feel free and share my feelings. As I look back on that experience, it wasn't like the therapist was the best therapist in the world. However, he gave me the space and opportunity to express my feelings and emotions in a meaningful way that I was forever grateful for.

You may think that therapy isn't for you or you may think that you definitely don't want to talk to a stranger about your problems. I promise you that therapy for you. You may have a nagging feeling that something needs to change. Whatever you have been doing in the past is no longer serving you. Do you have the facade that everything is going well in your life? However, you are facing an internal battle within? Therapy can be a place where you can figure it out. Therapy is a safe space where you can express your feelings and emotions. It can be a place where you can learn healthy coping strategies that improve your overall mental health. I know you may be thinking how others will perceive you they knew you was going to therapy. I get it there is still a stigma regarding mental health especially in Black and Brown communities.

As a community, we need to normalize going to therapy. We also need to normalize taking care of ourselves. Therapy is an amazing form of self-care. Prioritizing your mental health will directly impact every facet of your life. Through therapy, you will have effective coping strategies that you can use. Therapy can help you practice boundary setting for others and yourself. When you are looking for a therapist, you should look for who would be the best fit for you. If you want a therapist of color or similar cultural backgrounds, make that a priority. If you want a therapist who is part of the LBGTQIA+ community, make that a priority. It is also okay to try out different therapists until you find the right fit. Remember, not every therapist will be the right fit, and that is perfectly fine! If you are the person who finds themselves putting their needs on the back burner but showing

up for others, then therapy is a place where you can make yourself a priority.