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New Age, Old Rhetoric: The Viability of Self-Help Literature for African American Readers

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Abstract

This study explores cultural mistrust and cost of treatment as reasons for African American underutilization of traditional mental health services. First, study rationale presented self-help literature as a viable alternative/supplement to professional mental health treatment by arguably diminishing the mentioned reasons’ effects. Second, the study analyzed if selected self-help literature directly, indirectly, or was irrelevant for addressing two reasons for poor mental health in African American communities—economic strain and heightened cultural mistrust—and whether a book was or was not race-affirmative. Elaboration of methodological terminology is included in Appendix B. Twelve books were chosen by ranked Amazon listing within the general genre’s (6) and its new-age subgenre’s (6) “Top-Rated” section. Key findings included consistency in themes across the books analyzed, particularly the themes accountability and acceptance as well as their variations. All themes were found to be at least indirectly relevant to the issues of economic strain and heightened cultural mistrust; two out of the twelve books were viewed as race affirmative. These findings partially supported self-help literature as an alternative/supplement to professional mental health treatment insofar of generalizability. Said literature largely did not cater to African American perspectives, which may lessen relevance for some African American readers. Additional limitations include this study being a qualitative review of a small sample of self-help literature. Future research should be both quantitative/qualitative and/or include a larger sample of top-rated, and otherwise, self-help literature. Moreover, cultural mistrust and its existence in clinical mental health contexts (i.e., medical mistrust) requires additional research.
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Introduction

Research suggests that African Americans often underutilize mental health treatment services (Cummings & Druss, 2011; González et al., 2010; Neighbors et al., 2007). This is particularly concerning considering the rising rate of mental illness in African Americans communities from 16% in 2018 to 21.4% by 2021 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2019; SAMHSA, 2021). Among other reasons, including preference for informal means of treatment like the church, such underutilization may be attributable to African American mistrust of medical institutions, and society at large, as well as cost of treatment (Corbie-Smith & Arriola, 2012; Cuevas, 2013; Hayes, 2015; Hooper et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2006; Suite et al., 2007). The impact of these factors and seemingly slow efforts to mitigate their prevalence makes considering alternatives important (Muvuka et al., 2020; Saha et al., 2008; Suite et al., 2007). Hence, this study chose to examine self-help literature and its new-age sub-genre as alternatives or supplements to traditional forms of mental healthcare for African Americans.

For individuals who live beyond reasonable proximity to a mental health professional and/or lack finances to afford care, a self-help book with techniques targeted towards those suffering from a particular disorder—anxiety, depression, etc.—could be a great substitute (Bergsma, 2008; Planey et al., 2019). And considering African Americans’ wary attitudes towards mental health professionals and medical professionals generally, the anticipation of discrimination by professional counsellors might be avoided (Cénat, 2020; Samuel, 2015; Zuvekas & Fleishman, 2008). Moreover, self-help literature is explored by simultaneously treating cultural mistrust and cost, in the form of financial strain, as issues
the literature can “treat”. Whether the literature does so in ways that are race affirmative is explored as well. To note, this study views general self-help literature as popular nonfiction that explains to readers how to better deal with life (Marquis, 2019). Its New-Age counterpart refers to spiritually oriented self-help literature rooted in its namesake movement from the 1970s and the late 1800s New Thought movement (Effing, 2009; Levin, 2022; McGee, 2005). Moreover, New-Age books were chosen given the movement’s recent re-popularization among US audiences (Gecewicz, 2018).

To assess whether self-help literature and its new-age sub-genre are promising alternatives or supplements to traditional mental health treatment, in-depth analysis of best-selling titles within the genre and sub-genre are examined. Literature is analyzed in the following order: *Never Finished* by David Goggins (2022), *Atomic Habits* by James Clear (2018), *The Light We Carry* by Michelle Obama (2022), *The 48 Laws of Power* by Robert Greene (2019), *The Boy, The Mole, The Fox, and The Horse* by Charlie Mackesy (2019), *The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck* by Mark Manson (2016), *As A Man Thinketh* by James Allen (1902), *The Café On The Edge of The World* by John Strelecky (2020), *The Highly Sensitive* by Judy Dyer (2018), *The Land Of The Gods* by H.P. Blavatsky (2022), *Awaken To Your True Self* by Andrew Daniel (2022), and *The Empowered Empath* by Judy Dyer (2019). Titles were chosen the week of January 2nd, 2023 and according to their ranked Amazon listing within the genre’s and subgenre’s “Top-Rated” section. Regarding the new-age sub-genre, some top-ranked works were journals for diary writing, and, thus, were skipped until a book followed.

Subsequent findings and critiques involved an analysis of how relevant the material was to issues regarding cost and cultural/medical mistrust within the African American community as well as if the literature conveyed positive race portrayals of African Americans. Does the
selected self-help literature itself provide alternative support to African American readers by directly or indirectly addressing the issues of economic distress and cultural/medical mistrust? (Earl et al., 2016; Cox & Tamir, 2022) To note, this question is asked in respect to the literature itself, not to readers’ responses. Additionally, since scholars and commentators argue that self-help has been traditionally targeted towards the white, middle-class, do the selected works offer race-affirmative help to African American readers? (Chan-Malik, 2022; Mowat & Lindloff, 1996). Elaboration of methodological terminology—i.e., direct, indirect, irrelevant, and race-affirmative—is included in a final appendix. Finally, study limitations and recommendations for future research are explored.

Main Body

African Americans and Attitude Towards Mental Health Treatment

The attitudinal factor “mistrust” is often used to explain African Americans’ underutilization of professional mental health treatment (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Terrell & Terrel, 1981; Whaley, 2001; Carlisle & Murray, 2020). First theoretically examined, mistrust was considered adaptive and necessary for living in white society (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Ridley, 1984; Ridley, 1986). Black psychiatrists William Grier and Price Cobbs (1968) were among the first individuals to create a theory on black consciousness within white, American society. Their book “Black Rage” situates black troubles in the United States as affecting all black people rather than a few extremists (Grier & Cobbs, 1968).

Grier and Cobbs (1968) use case studies from their psychiatric work to support their claim (Grier & Cobbs, 1968) “Miss Y.”, for example, was a woman whose issues with paranoid schizophrenia caused her to distrust friends, family, and her predominantly white work environment (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Although Miss Y’s condition complicates the validity of her belief in experiencing outright racism, the timing of the
book’s release could suggest so. Grier and Cobbs (1968) believed that to be the case whereby the subtler instances of discrimination became acutely perceptible (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Nonetheless, the argument has less to do with the actuality of discrimination than with its anticipation. As a result, a “healthy cultural paranoia” develops (Grier & Cobbs, 1968).

Healthy cultural paranoia refers to being acutely aware of possible social threats, such as racism, without developing an unhealthy preoccupation with said threats (Grier & Cobbs, 1968). Charles Ridley (1984) adapted the term to theoretically explore specific issues faced by African Americans during encounters with white therapists. The term has since been referred to as “cultural mistrust” given the pathological connotation of “paranoia” (Ridley, 1986). Ridley (1984) explored an African American individual’s unwillingness to verbally self-disclose their feelings and/or thoughts, particularly the feelings and/or thoughts most intimate to the individual. As did Grier and Cobbs (1968), Ridley concluded that the black individual remains closed-off to avoid potential discrimination (1984). Potential discrimination refers to “therapist insensitivity, stereotyping, lack of specialized training, and failure to establish rapport” (Ridley, 1984, p. 1237). This is then extrapolated to a larger, worldly context; the white clinician becomes a symbol for the larger white society (Whaley, 2001; Whaley, 2002). Theoretical research continued among researchers such as Neville and Mobley (2001), who contextualized cultural mistrust using an ecological model that emphasized the relationship between an individual’s response behaviors and their environment. Empirical research on cultural mistrust began with the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI) developed by researchers Francis Terrel and Sandra Terrel (1981).

The CMI sought to measure the extent of mistrust blacks experienced in the following contexts: training and education settings, interpersonal relations, work and business settings, and law and politics (Neville et al., 2008; Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Respondents answered 48
items in the inventory according to a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree (Terrell & Terrell, 1981; Thompson et al., 1994). F. Terrel and S. Terrell (1981) had administered the Cultural Mistrust Inventory to roughly 130 black, male undergraduate students via a black, male examiner. Examples of items in the inventory include the following: “whites are usually fair to all people regardless of color” and “white friends are least likely to break their promise”. (Nickerson et al., 1994, p. 380). F. Terrell and S. Terrell’s (1981) results found that students with “high exposure to racial discrimination had higher mistrust scores than those with lower exposure to racial discrimination” across contexts (Terrell & Terrell, 1981, p. 180). Statistical findings showed a test-retest reliability of .83 and adequate criterion-related validity (Terrell & Terrell, 1981, as cited in Whaley, 2002). In other words, scores obtained through the test when administered to the same group of black undergraduates more than once were consistent across times taken and were found to accurately measure the variables sought for (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Following studies continued to use the CMI and college students to test cultural mistrust.

Thompson and colleagues (1994) conducted a study in which they examined self-disclosing tendencies among 100 black, female undergraduates at a predominantly white university towards a black female therapist and white female therapist. To note, the therapists were doctoral students in counseling psychology who received training for the study (Thompson et al., 1994). The relevant variables studied included the counselor’s race and counted instances of self-disclosure; results revealed a correlative relationship via a Tukey’s HSD tool (Thompson et al., 1994). Lower levels of cultural mistrust were correlated with more disclosing statements to Black counsellors (Thompson et al., 1994). Higher levels of cultural mistrust correlated with less disclosing statements to White counsellors (Thompson et al., 1994). Nickerson and colleagues (1994) similarly employed the CMI on a sample of 105 male and female black undergraduate students to examine the relationship
between cultural mistrust, opinions on mental illness, and help-seeking attitudes. Other scales such as “the Opinions About Mental Illness Scale (OMI)” and “the Reid-Gundlach Social Service Satisfaction Scale (R-GSSS)” were used (Nickerson et al., 1994, p. 380). According to the researchers’ results from regression analyses, cultural mistrust appeared the most significant predictor for less help-seeking tendencies compared to opinions about mental illnesses (Nickerson et al., 1994). The scores from the R-GSSS’s participants’ anticipation of satisfactory service section, found in the study’s table 4 summary of betas, suggested as such (Nickerson et al., 1994).

Later studies continued to employ the same methodological framework to measure cultural mistrust in African Americans while incorporating additional variables (Bell & Tracey, 2006; Compton, 2021; Harrington & Fugère, 2010). Bell and Tracey (2006) looked to determine a link between cultural mistrust via the CMI and Scale of Cultural Mistrust (SCM) and psychological health via the variables life satisfaction and symptomatic distress. 125 African American students, both male and female, from a predominantly white university were involved in the study and received the inventories by mail (Bell & Tracey, 2006). Results found that while correlations between cultural mistrust and psychological health were not significant, the correlations did approach significance (Bell & Tracey, 2006). Cultural mistrust and the life satisfaction variable reached a p-value of 0.06 compared to 0.01; cultural mistrust and symptomatic distress reached 0.07 (Bell & Tracey, 2006). Erika Harrington and Madeline Fugère (2010) and David Compton (2021) explored cultural mistrust and psychological health through the variable perceived racism. Perceived racism concerns subjective interpretations of racial discrimination (Harrington & Fugère, 2010).

Harrington and Fugère’s (2010) study involved 65 White, Black, Asian, and Latino students at a liberal arts college who were given inventories measuring perceived racism (Perceived Racism Scale, PRS), depression (Beck Depression Inventory second edition, BDI-II), and
cultural mistrust (CMI) (Harrington & Fugère, 2010). Results revealed statistically significant relationships between perceived racism and cultural mistrust by a p-value of .001 (Harrington & Fugère, 2010). Compton’s (2021) study likewise used a racially diverse group of college students at a Christian university to test whether a link existed between perceived racism and the race of the college students. Besides the CMI, accompanying scales included the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CIS) and perceived racism’s Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire-Community Version (PEDQ-CV) (Compton, 2021). Relevant results found statistical significance across all subscales for the CIS and the PEDQ-CV for African American participants. Despite higher scores in metacognitive and cognitive ability to adjust cultural knowledge to present circumstances, black individuals perceived substantially more discrimination than their White, Asian, and Latino counterparts by at least a 10-point mean difference and 2-point standard deviation difference (Compton, 2021). Following judgements can be made that cultural intelligence does not erase mistrust but rather mitigates it.

Although these later studies offer insights into African Americans and cultural mistrust, generalizability is an issue. Enrico Jones (1978) was one of the first to note a heavy reliance on analogue studies rather than studies of actual psychotherapy. Analogue studies refer to studies that replicate the situation of interest under similar, but not identical, conditions (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023). Issues identified included non-professional therapists and using college students as subjects (Jones, 1978). Additionally, black students attending a predominantly white university, focusing on liberal universities, and different population types according to level of education were mentioned as limitations in the aforementioned studies (Bell & Tracey, 2006; Compton, 2021; Harrington & Fugère, 2010). Moreover, the interpersonal contexts the CMI explores do not account for the healthcare system context (Terrell & Terrell, 1981). Hence, it is not an effective tool for
specifically examining the relationship between cultural mistrust and the healthcare system (Carlisle & Murray, 2020; Thompson et al., 2003). The Group-Based Medical Mistrust Scale (GBMMS) has since been developed to account for this context (Thompson et al., 2004).

The GBMMS determines how suspicious an individual is of healthcare institutions (Thompson et al., 2004). Suspicion concerns the healthcare institution itself, the individual(s) that work within the healthcare institution, and perceptions of treatment reflective of a client’s racial/ethnic group (Carlisle & Murray, 2020; Thompson et al., 2004). Thompson and colleagues (2004) developed and used the tool on a group of African American and Latina women from East Harlem, New York to assess hesitancy surrounding cancer screening. The 12-item scale was a Likert type and ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (Thompson et al., 2004). Examples of items included “People of my ethnic group should not confide in doctors and healthcare workers because it will be used against them” and “People of my ethnic group should be suspicious of information from doctors and healthcare workers” (Thompson et al., 2003, p. 211) Via regression models, their results found that the “total GBMSS, suspicion, and lack of provider support scores were positively associated with cancer screening cons and negatively associated with cancer screening pros” (Thompson et al., 2004, p. 214). In other words, attitudes of mistrust and unwillingness to seek professional medical help appeared related and the study measured these variables using regression models (Thompson et al., 2004). Statistical significance (p-value less than 0.05) was found for all associations excluding group disparities and cancer screening cons as well as lack of support from health care providers and Latino acculturation (Thompson et al., 2004).

To account for the GBMSS’s reliability across gender, a later study sought to validate the tool within a group of black men from New York City (Shelton et al., 2010). Results revealed that the GBBMS and its measured variables retained reliability as it did with Thompson and
colleagues’ (2004) group of African American and Latina women (Shelton et al., 2010). Internal consistency refers to whether different items used within a study measure the same general construct and “was found high for the total GBMMS and its three sub-scales” (p. 552-553)—alpha scores of .87, .83, and .65, respectively (Shelton et al., 2010). Construct validity was also high given the negative correlation between the total GBMMS score and health care access—p-value of less than 0.0001 (Shelton et al., 2010).

On a broader scale, however, measurement of medical mistrust needs further research. Studies of empirical and analytical work have found clear consistency in theme and data values, but both qualitative and quantitative research on the subject are limited (Benkert et al., 2019; Jaiswal & Perry, 2019). Benkert and colleagues (2019) analyzed 124 peer-reviewed articles from 1998 to 2018 that discussed medical mistrust. Issues recognized included the broadness of qualitative research aims and quantitative research on the subject being in its infancy (Benkert et al., 2019). The concept of medical mistrust has not often been studied in isolation, nor has it been studied among various populations of interest—by sexual orientation, by different races, by educational level, etc. (Benkert et al., 2019). Nonetheless, the majority of the quantitative and qualitative research focuses on African Americans and, thus, offers some research to understand the concept’s significance within the group (Benkert et al., 2019). For example, Adams et al. (2017) performed a review of 27 empirical studies from 2000-2017 that examined the relationship between medical mistrust and prostate cancer screening among African American men. While definitive links between medical mistrust and colorectal cancer were not available in the quantitative research, strong correlations between the variables were present and the amount of qualitative and quantitative research is growing (Adams et al., 2017). Nonetheless, how this research applies to clinical mental health contexts is needed. For now, it can be presumed that these research outcomes are applicable to the clinical mental health context.
African Americans and Cost of Mental Healthcare

In the United States, the relationship between cost and mental healthcare utilization is strongly correlated and highly contentious (Lindsey et al., 2013; Mukolo & Hefflinger, 2011; Murry et al., 2011). Sareen and colleagues’ (2007) cross-national study of perceived barriers to mental healthcare utilization found United States citizens reporting financial barriers more than respondents in the Netherlands or Ontario (Sareen et al., 2007). Moreover, low-income respondents from the U.S. were more likely to report financial barriers than their low-income cross-national counterparts (Sareen et al., 2007). Other mental healthcare studies completed in the U.S. during the early 2000s found evidence of increasing cost of healthcare and problems faced by the underinsured and uninsured (Mojtabai, 2005; Rowan et al., 2013). Spanning data from 1999 to 2010, Rowan et al. (2013) used the Integrated Health Interview Series (IHIS) to determine the amount of cost barrier complaints relative to insurance coverage for mental healthcare. Reports of cost barriers increased among the privately insured and uninsured (Rowan et al., 2013). “…In 2009-2010, among people with serious [mental health] problems, 18.2 percent of those with public health insurance and 30.3 percent of those with private insurance reported that costs were a barrier to getting needed mental health care” (Rowan et al., 2013, p. 7). Yet, United States government officials were optimistic of the nation mitigating rates of poor mental health (Mojtabai, 2005).

The 2003 President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health report and the 1999 Surgeon General’s report on mental health both claimed that the United States was headed towards better mental health outcomes (Center for Mental Health Services, 1999; US Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2003). The Commission found recovery from mental illness a “real possibility” (HHS, 2003, p.1) Issues that could now be addressed included financing via incentivizing insurers to flexibly deliver mental healthcare and disparities via increasing
culturally competent care and studying minority experiences (HHS, 2003). The 1999 Surgeon General’s report concluded, among other reasons, that universalizing mental health treatment was possible via including insurance coverage of mental health treatment as well as tailoring treatment to age, race, gender, and culture (Center For Mental Health Services, 1999). However, data accumulated countering these hopeful claims (Mojtabai, 2005; Rowan et al., 2013; Bailey et al., 2017; Artiga et al., 2022).

Concerning barriers to treatment for minority groups, data collected from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) between the years of 1997-2002 found a downward trend in contact with mental healthcare and upward trend in cost (Mojtabai, 2005). The amount of NHIS participants reporting inability to afford treatment rose from 15.6 percent to 20 percent, and a minority’s contact with professional mental health services minimally increased (Mojtabai, 2005). Concerning African Americans, recent studies partially connected unmet mental health need and lower demand for services to cost (Bailey et al., 2017; Rostain et al., 2015). According to a 2012 census report on income and health insurance coverage in the United States, African Americans’ median household income was two-thirds that of non-Hispanic white households (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2013). And at the time, twenty-seven percent of African Americans were living below the poverty line compared to 10 percent of non-Hispanic white respondents (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2013). Drops in employer-sponsored healthcare insurance from 1999 to 2009 likely influenced these statistical findings (Rowan et al., 2013). Firms offering employee-coverage for mental health services declined from 59 to 56 percent; workers with employer-provided coverage decreased from 69 to 61 percent (Sonier et al., 2013). Combined with low-income household statistics that make securing private insurance difficult, African Americans were at severe risk of becoming and remaining uninsured (Rostain et al., 2015). Recent statistics particular to mental healthcare coverage present concerning findings. In a study examining racial/ethnic differences
in mental health service usage, SAMHSA (2015) found “…16.6 percent of white adults had used mental health services compared with 8.6 and 7.3 percent of black and Hispanic adults, respectively” (p. 20). Across races/ethnicities, the same study found that the most common reason for non-use of mental health services was cost or insurance (SAMHSA, 2015). Alongside structural barriers, cost or insurance continued to be a common reason in an updated report on mental health service usage by race/ethnicity (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality [CBHSQ], 2021). The introduction of Medicaid seemingly rectified the problem of health insurance accessibility (Rowan et al., 2013; SAMHSA, 2012).

Individuals eligible for Medicaid include low-income adults, people with disabilities, pregnant women, and children (Center for Medicaid and CHIP Services [CMCS], 2023). While initially limited to those with very low incomes, Medicaid eligibility expanded under the Affordable Care Act passed in 2010 (Bailey et al., 2017; Beronio et al., 2014; Rowan et al., 2013) Insurance plans were then required to not only cover mental health and substance abuse services among other typically insured health services, but also offer them with medical and surgical benefits (Beronio et al., 2014). Between 2013 and 2016, a study conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reported Medicaid lowering the uninsured rate among nonelderly African Americans from 18.9 percent to 11.7 percent among nonelderly African Americans (Bailey et al., 2017). However, African Americans continue to experience cost-related barriers relative to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.

Not a government sanctioned policy, states are not required under the Affordable Care Act to implement its low-income eligibility expansions (Bailey et al., 2017). Only 4 out of the 13 states accounting for roughly 50 percent of the African American population in the United States implemented Medicaid expansion in 2014 (Buettgens & Kenney, 2016). Such states and other critics of Medicaid expansion often
differentiate the deserving poor from the undeserving poor (Snowden & Graaf, 2019). Deserving poor refers to children, pregnant women, and persons with disabilities while undeserving poor refers to those able-bodied who seemingly do not require dependence (Moffitt, 2015; Snowden & Graaf, 2019). Being able-bodied, those undeserving should work for their healthcare coverage or personally pay for healthcare expenses (Snowden & Graaf, 2019). These and similar issues regarding Medicaid, the Affordable Care Act, and African Americans persist into recent years.

Taken from the years 1963 to 2019 and using the White-Black expenditure ratio, a cross-sectional study of healthcare use between white and black individuals found initial narrowing in use but subsequent widening since (Dickman et al., 2022). The expenditure ratio was narrow at a value 1.96 in the 1960s, eventually widening to 1.39 by the 1980s and onward (Dickman et. al., 2022). The Kaiser Family Foundation’s exploration of health coverage trends suggests that the widening is partly due to an increase in coverage disparities (Artiga et al., 2022). As of 2021, uninsured rates for African Americans sits at 10.9 percent (Artiga et al., 2022). This is only a 0.8 percent increase in uninsured rates to the percentage stated by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in 2017 (Bailey et al., 2017). States currently choosing not to expand their Medicaid policies have uninsured rates almost twice as high as those in expansion states (Artiga et al., 2022). Moreover, as of November 2022, 11 states have not expanded Medicaid to include the ACA provisions (Artiga et al., 2022). Recent government and/or individual efforts have been made to promote cost-efficient insurance policies and to generally counteract inaccessibility to healthcare.

Recent suggestions for future economic directions in healthcare, let alone mental healthcare, for African Americans are promising (Snowden & Graaf, 2021; Kishore & Hayden, 2020; Musumeci, 2021). Researchers Snowden and Graaf (2021) suggested a re-authorization of
the expired 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES). Provisions would include those already implemented—extended unemployment aid, eviction relief, loan payment postponement, etc.—but also rental assistance for non-homeowners (Snowden & Graaf, 2021). Technological modems for providing care appear cost-efficient (Ramos & Chavira, 2019). Massive Open Online Interventions (MOOIs), for example, are free, self-guided web interventions that provide evidence-based psychological services (Muñoz et al., 2016).

Researchers Kishore and Hayden (2020) recommended funding towards community health centers. Said centers provide comprehensive medical care to Americans regardless of insurance or immigration status and are primarily utilized by low-income racial/ethnic minorities (Davis et al., 1999; Kishore & Hayden, 2020; Lemon et al., 2006). Without proper funding, particularly following the onset of COVID-19, these individuals may be at a severe health disadvantage (Forrest & Whelan, 2000; Kishore & Haydem, 2020; Corallo & Tolbert, 2020).

To make such decisions, cross-sector collaboration is required (Noonan et al., 2016). Trained health professionals knowledgeable in the needs of African American communities must speak up or otherwise be misrepresented by public and private sector leaders lacking knowledge on healthcare disparities (Noonan et al., 2016). Changes as seen with the American Rescue Plan Act and investment into healthcare navigators show promise that ideas are being put into action, but disparities have yet to be eliminated (Musumeci, 2021; HHS, 2022).

**African Americans and Self-Help Literature**

In the U.S., self-help literature influences and is influenced by the public’s ideals (Dolby; 2005; Effing, 2009; Blum, 2020). Scholar Mercè Effing (2009) argues that Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography (1791/2020) and its surrounding socio-political context mark the beginning of non-fiction self-help literature as it is known today (Blum, 2020). Embodying the ideals of the American Enlightenment movement—justice,
liberty, and equality—Franklin presented strategies for success applicable to the average person (Butler-Bowdon, 2003). Strategies reflected Franklin’s protestant background and involved practicing temperance, frugality, and discipline (Franklin, 1791/2020). Later self-help works built upon these traits and further developed the meaning of the American Dream as an individual pursuit. For the remainder of this study, the reader must be aware that references to “self-help literature” are only to its non-fiction aspects.

Authors such as Scott Peck and Stephen R. Covey explored the theme of improvement through religious and business orientations, respectively (Peck, 1978/2003; Covey, 2020/1989). Peck’s The Road Less Travelled (1978/2003) describes laziness as humanity’s original sin, which can be overcome through work and self-discipline. Covey’s Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (2020/1989) described the self as a long-term investment that positively accrues value over time. Again, there is an indirect reference to discipline and hard work. Other authors had taken the mind-power approach, which refers to an individual’s thoughts having the power to significantly influence reality (Hutchinson, 2014). These books were particularly attractive as individuals began to challenge the American cultural ethos of consumerism and success in the name of spiritual enrichment (Effing, 2009). Literature examples include Napoleon Hill’s Think and Grow Rich (1937/2005) and Norman Vincent Peale’s The Power of Positive Thinking (1952/2003).

Peale, moreover, was a pioneer in introducing mental health into self-help literature in the mid-20th century and influenced self-help literature’s focus on the mind-body connection (Effing, 2009). Henceforth, the mind-power approach to self-help books increasingly intertwined with psychological terminology while often maintaining its spiritual underpinnings (Blum, 2020). Examples of this hybrid group include the Dalai Lama’s The Art of Happiness: A Handbook For Living (2009), Deepak Chopra’s Seven Spiritual Laws of Success (1994), and Joe
Dispenza’s Becoming Supernatural (2017). Including the books analyzed in this study, many contemporary examples lean towards being work-ethic oriented, being psycho-spiritually based, or both (Dolby, 2005). Likely due to its versatility, self-help literature has significantly grown in popularity among clinical professionals and laymen (Bergsma, 2008; Gualano et al., 2017; Hirai & Clum, 2006; Norcross et al., 2000; Redding et al., 2008).

Gualano and colleagues’ (2017) systematic review of self-help books’ effects in clinical contexts found the books to have “[positive] durable effects on the general adult population” (p. 12). A study included in a meta-analysis by Floyd et al. (2004) compared the effects of cognitive bibliotherapy to the effects of individual psychotherapy and delayed treatment. 46 volunteers over sixty with clinically diagnosed depression were equally split into three intervention groups for each intervention type (Floyd et al., 2004). Self-administered cognitive bibliotherapy’s 3-month follow-up results revealed permanent improvements compared to those who received individual psychotherapy or had their treatment delayed (Floyd et al., 2004) A similar study involved 55 anxiety-disordered children between the ages of 7 and 14 who were placed into 1 of 3 treatment conditions: individual therapy, therapist-supported bibliotherapy, and wait-list (Cobham, 2012). Results indicated that therapist-supported bibliotherapy had a higher rate of remission for two out of the three follow-up assessments (Cobham, 2012). Respective to the times of post-treatment, 3-month follow-up, and 6 month follow-up, 78.3 percent, 69.6 percent, and 78.3 percent of children from the individual therapy group were diagnosis free while 95 percent, 85 percent, and 75 percent of children from the bibliotherapy group were diagnosis free (Cobham, 2012).
As a cost-efficient option to professional mental health treatment that gives privacy to the individual, self-help literature’s laymen popularity can presumably be justified (Bergsma, 2008; Redding et al., 2008; Starker, 1989/2002; Wild, 2018). Self-help literature touches on a variety of subjects an individual can choose from (Bergsma, 2008; Dolby, 2005). Subjects include obtaining emotional literacy if an individual lacked childhood examples, diminishing anxiety, improving communication skills, developing better habits, and becoming financially stable (Carnegie, 1936; Clear, 2018; Gibson, 2015; Groeschel, 2021; Jackson, 2020). The simplification of psychological jargon into everyday terms contributes to their accessibility as well (Santrock et al., 1994; Starker, 1989/2002; Effing, 2009). However, this may also be a con.

Many self-help books aren’t empirically validated but are presented as though they are; a self-help author may be able to pass understanding of complex psychological terminology via charm and personability (Arkowitz & Lilienfield, 2006; Szalavitz, 2014; Rosen, 1993). Individuals such as Tony Robbins publish books as purported “expert(s) in the psychology of change” with no formal credentials (Arkowitz & Lilienfield, 2006, p. 78). Clinical psychologist Gerald Rosen (1993) had earlier described this issue as professional psychological associations failing to inform the public on navigating self-help treatments/programs. Nonetheless, self-help books have been and are projected to continue to be popular with American audiences, empirically sound or not (Grand View Research, 2021). The personal development industry currently sits at 41.81 billion dollars and its expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) is 5.5 percent from 2022 to 2030 (Grand View Research, 2021).

As a silver lining, self-help literature’s empirical support and laymen popularity are promising for potential African Americans readers avoiding traditional mental health treatment. To reiterate, the issues of cost and cultural mistrust partially contribute to African Americans’ non-use of professional mental health treatments and to poorer mental health outcomes (Artiga et al., 2022; Mukolo & Heflinger, 2011; Adams et al.,
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2017; Shelton et al., 2010). Where self-help literature first rectifies these issues is its low costs compared to face-to-face therapy (Bergsma, 2008; Popa & Porumbu, 2017; Stip et al., 2020). Secondly, feelings of cultural mistrust are avoided by providing the individual the privacy to work through their mental health needs (Floyd et al., 2004; Kazdin & Blase, 2011; Starker, 1989/2002; Wild, 2018). As put by Cuijpers (1997), this form of treatment avoids anticipatory stigma within individuals unprepared or unwilling to speak to a therapist. And sociologist Paul Lichterman (1992) uses the term “thin culture” to describe the selective adoption of self-help principles by an individual. African American consumers can do the same, albeit to potentially limiting extents.

The typical consumer population of self-help books and wellness materials generally has been the white, middle-class (Grodin & Lindlof, 1996). Commentators in recent years purport that this has not changed (Chan-Malik, 2022; Róisín, 2022). Author of Who Is Wellness For? (2022), Fariha Róisín discusses the wellness-industry’s consumer base insofar of her relationship to healing and her identity as an Australian, Bangladeshi woman. White self-help gurus have taken culturally linked principles and/or practices like meditation, as did Benjamin Franklin with Confucius’s principles on living, and potentially warped their meanings in ways fit for white audiences (Franklin, 1738; Róisín, 2022). Practices like meditation become infused with the ethos of individuality; to focus on personal success first and communal issues second (Róisín, 2022). A trickle-down effect is presumed to occur. But, as put by Róisín (2022), “…how can we possibly believe that programming people to think only for themselves could result in holistically positive results?” (p. 117). Moreover, this question ironically includes the presumption that the individualistic approach is successful when the negative social consequences of acting in such a way for Black individuals and those within other minority communities can be great.
Black commentator Rebecca Stevens (2021) briefly discussed her issues with being recommended self-help books written by a “middle-class, Ivy-league school-educated…entitled white man.” (para. 1) She argues that the principles said authors espouse are more likely to harm than help. According to Stevens (2021), the advice “be more assertive” could draw consequences of being labelled “angry and aggressive”; to “demolish and crush your adversaries” could lead to professional and social ostracization (para. 3). If not this type, the self-help genre has begun to splinter enough to create space for writers who cater to the Black, and other minority, perspectives (Cutruzzula, 2016). According to sociology professor at Fordham University Micki McGee, “advice literature tailored to different groups…can provide more useful advice as it addresses the varied social expectations we each face in a highly differentiated world” (as cited in Cutruzzula, 2016, p. 2016). Returning to this study’s focus, issues such as financial strain and cultural/medical mistrust may be addressed in the variety of self-help books pertaining to improving emotional intelligence and communication skills, improving productivity, etc. (Clear, 2017; Gibson, 2015; Groeschel, 2021; Jackson, 2020). Clinical interest in the utility of self-help books for African Americans has begun to grow as well (Johnson, 2012; Rawls et al., 2020).

Rawls et al. (2020) conducted a collective case study with African American college students to test for the positive effects of bibliotherapy in a group counselling setting. A copy of Act Like a Lady and Think Like a Man (Harvey, 2009) was given to each participant from which group discussions were based (Rawls et al., 2020). Out of the 7 African Americans initially recruited, only 3 of the 7 went through with research interviews following group counselling (Rawls et al., 2020). Positive effects identified by interviewees included the book acting as a helpful facilitator, the ability to take different perspectives, and the ability to introspect (Rawls et al., 2020). Another study proposed books such as The Autobiography of Malcom X (Haley, 1965/1992), The Community of Self (Akbar, 1985), Afeni Shakur (Guy, 2005), and Makes Me Wanna
Holla: A Young Black Man in America (McCall, 1995) as aids to treating substance-addicted African Americans (Johnson, 2012). These books were recommended to inspire hope and self-love while facing potentially race-related issues like unemployment (Johnson, 2012). Given the limited studies currently available, future research is necessary to further substantiate bibliotherapy’s positive effects on African American populations. This is especially important given the aforementioned criticisms of popularized self-help literature as catering to the white, affluent demographic (Chan-Malik, 2022; Grodin & Lindlof, 1996; Róisín, 2022; Stevens, 2021). From the additional perspective of literature content’s relevancy, this study hopes to valuably add to the subject’s existing research.

Methods

This study was guided by a broad question: "can self-help literature be considered a viable alternative or supplement to traditional mental health treatment for African-Americans?" Cultural mistrust and cost were selected as factors contributing to underutilization of traditional mental health treatment. These factors were initially analyzed on their own and later analyzed in respect to self-help literature in the “African Americans and Self-Help Literature” section. Located in the results and discussion sections, following questions concerned how relevant a book’s theme(s) were to addressing the issues of cost/economic as well as how race-affirmative a book was.

To obtain background information on the research question, the literature review was split across three domains: African Americans and cultural mistrust; African Americans and cost of mental healthcare; and African Americans and self-help literature. Sources were chosen according to a “then-now” framework. For example, research on African Americans and cultural mistrust included articles discussing the term’s
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origins and articles discussing its current understandings. Strengths and limitations of older and newer research were discussed in each section. Research leaned more towards current interpretations of a domain to maintain the study’s relevancy.

Scholarly articles and books were found via PsycNet, ProQuest, JSTOR, Science Direct, Wiley, and Google Scholar. First, for African Americans and cultural mistrust, search terms used were “African Americans AND cultural mistrust”, “cultural mistrust”, “African Americans AND healthcare barriers”, and “African Americans AND help-seeking behaviors”. The key term “medical mistrust” was later added to account for the evolution of cultural mistrust’s meaning and its connection to mental healthcare. Second, for African Americans and cost of mental healthcare, search terms used were “African Americans AND cost of mental healthcare”, “African Americans AND cost of healthcare”, “African Americans AND Medicaid”, and “African Americans AND healthcare barriers”. Third, for self-help literature, search terms used were “self-help literature”, “self-help books”, “popular self-help books”, “popular self-help literature”, “benefits of self-help books”, “benefits of self-help literature”, “criticism of self-help books”, and “criticism of self-help literature”. The search terms “African Americans and self-help literature”, “African Americans and self-help books”, and “African Americans and bibliotherapy” produced significantly less results compared to the previous search terms. Finally, the search terms “African Americans AND mental health” and “African Americans AND mental healthcare” were also used in this section to explicitly identify causes for African-Americans’ poor mental health and connect these causes to the chosen self-help literature’s themes.

To further answer the research question, twelve self-help book titles were picked from Amazon’s Top-Rated section the week of January 2nd, 2023. Six titles came from the general self-help genre and six from its new-age sub-genre. The latter were chosen due to their current
popularity. Regarding the new age sub-genre, some top-ranked works were journals for diary writing, and, thus, were skipped until a book followed. Note-taking for each title involved highlighting its general themes in relation to issues surrounding African Americans’ mental health. Issues discussed were heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Other issues likely exist but were not chosen for this study.

Notes on a book’s themes fell into one of three categories in relationship to how they addressed heightened cultural mistrust and cost/economic strain: direct, indirect, or unrelated/unhelpful. Direct referred to themes in a book that explicitly addressed cost/financial strain and cultural mistrust: for example, if a book described African Americans expressing cautiousness towards American society prior to suggesting a coping strategy. Indirect referred to themes in a book that could be justified as relevant to the issues of financial strain, cultural mistrust, and/or perceived racism but does not explicitly say so. For example, the belief that we all share a common humanity and therefore should love each other isn’t explicitly related to the concept of cultural mistrust but can be. Unrelated/unhelpful referred to themes in a book that weren’t considered relevant to resolving the issues of heightened cultural mistrust and financial strain. For example, a theme suggesting complete isolation from the world would fall in this category since an individual’s livelihood often depends on living in society. Justification for which category a theme belonged to was subjectively determined using one or two example scenarios. Concerning the book itself, a book was either categorized as race-affirmative or non-race-affirmative depending on whether a book did or did not provide productive advice for engaging with one’s racial identity.
To note, this study does not attempt to determine self-help literature’s empiric validity. Using a book’s content, this study seeks to determine if self-help literature acknowledges the previously mentioned issues in the African American community given self-help literature’s prevalence in American culture.

Results

The reader is referred to Appendix A for a summary of the titles, authors, main themes identified and my opinion on to what degree a book addressed the issues of heightened cultural mistrust and cost/economic strain as well as if a book could be considered race-affirmative. The reader is referred to Appendix B for definitions of the following key terms: indirect, direct, irrelevant, and race-affirmative.

Never Finished, David Goggins (2022) – Race-Affirmative

Summary

Never Finished describes success and fulfillment as an inevitably painful mental journey more than physical journey. “Long before the body goes soft, the mind will have softened” (Goggins, 2022, p. 60). To Goggins, pain and suffering should be viewed as mental fuel for continuing to strive towards one’s goals. His descriptions of lived experiences are meant to exemplify the psychological benefits to embracing pain. Examples include his training to become a Navy SEAL as well as training for ultramarathons such as the Leadville Trail 100 and The Natchez Trace 444. For Leadville Trail 100, to illustrate, Goggins ran fifteen-to-twenty miles every day for several weeks in preparation. Some of those training days involved running on minimal food to replicate likely conditions during race day. Prior to The Natchez Trace 44, Goggins
had managed to develop severe knee problems that were further exacerbated by a botched meniscus surgery. Eventually, successful realignment had been performed by an orthopedic doctor—Dr. Andreas Gomoll—at the seeming expense of not being able to train at walking level for another 3-6 months. Cycling became the next best thing, and the mental and physical training remained exhaustive. In both examples, Goggins was able to place himself within the Top 5 finishers. His ethos represents one of will and self-determination, which he believes are always available to the individual seeking them.

Key Themes

Accountability

“Roger that. It ain’t your fucking fault that you were dealt a bad hand, but…it is your responsibility. How long will you allow your past to hold you back before you finally take control of your future?” (Goggins, 2022, p. 18)

Early in the book, Goggins addresses his upbringing and relationship to his father as the initial contributors to his weakened sense of self. He described his father as mentally and physically abusive to him, his brother, and his mother. Beatings were reportedly a regularity in their home, and mental attacks were done by belittling. Returning to his childhood home, however, allowed Goggins to re-frame the narrative of blame he had been reliant on. As humorously put by Goggins (2022), “I needed Trunnis [Goggins’ father] to be the flaw in my existence in order to claim the lifetime warranty on my get-out-of-jail-free card” (p. 22). Similar was said regarding his identity as a black child bullied by the children of Ku Klux Klan members. The reality of pain and suffering was evident. Nonetheless, the choice to interpret the events as pain and
suffering was available as well. Hence, Goggins tells his reader that life’s most difficult moments do not have to feel emotionally insurmountable. The difficult can become the rewarding, and not according to the individual’s external circumstances.

This theme directly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and perceived racism. Racism’s reality is unquestionable to most, if not all, African Americans. Expectation of its occurrence under everyday circumstance is often warranted. But, as often outside of an individual’s direct control, energy spent towards worrying about it may not always be necessary. Goggins’ could neither control Trunnis’s behavior nor the environment Trunnis put him and his family in. Racist remarks dealt by peers were ultimately out of his control. By recognizing a lack of control, Goggins was better able to exercise detachment with his racist peers and abusive father. While indirectly addressing financial strain, the same idea applies. Individuals must acknowledge their role in creating the circumstances they exist in by whatever means they can. From Goggins’ perspective, living within a cycle of poverty doesn’t necessitate said cycle being perpetuated. Extreme limitations on one’s ability to act are excluded—e.g., incarceration—but planning should still be available to the individual.

**Resilience**

“Thanks to that one night in Buffalo, New York, when I accepted my fate and became determined to tap into my resilience, I found the will to transform myself into the grittiest motherfucker ever to find light where there was none.” (Goggins, 2022, p. 25)

Goggins defines resilience as continuously pushing beyond what the mind and body are capable of. To purposely enter into uncomfortable situations either prepared or unprepared. For Goggins, this meant performing new physical feats. He had run the Leadville Trail 100 after a heart-attack scare months prior and relied on a 10-week, 1,200 mile training plan. He had run the Moab 240 trail despite numerous
setbacks including a malfunctioning thyroid. Moab 240 required two attempts before total completion. Knowing the mental capacity he had to endure, Goggins held up and developed a greater tolerance for pain.

This theme is indirectly related to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Creating an attitude of resilience towards racial stressors may offset the negative effects of racial prejudice. An African American who recognizes the transience of a slur or racist act can both be better prepared the next time either happens and embrace their ability to overcome negativity. Resiliency develops by establishing such awareness and strengthens when maintained. Concerning financial strain, having an attitude of resiliency may help African Americans who currently struggle to make ends meet. If an African American individual currently works a low-paying job that requires strenuous mental and physical labor, then an attitude of resiliency allows them to recognize the power in being able to continue do so. The individual can either continue to work with newfound confidence or feel empowered to seek work elsewhere.


Summary

Atomic Habits breaks down goal-setting into its smaller parts. For example, an individual who has the goal to exercise more can begin with 5 minutes at the gym every other day. Clear states that this small act doesn’t seem like much to the average reader; the goal is much bigger than a mere 5 minutes at the gym. However, accrued over enough time, that one habit can amount to an identity that enjoys spending 1-2 hours at the gym. Hence, “habits are the compound interest of self-improvement” (Clear, 2018, p. 16). Clear (2018) delineates how to create a system in which habits last or are let go of: “make it obvious/invisible; make it attractive/unattractive, make it easy/difficult, and make it
satisfying/unsatisfying” (p. 213). However, developing a habit and maintaining it at peak-performance levels can become challenging due to boredom and laziness. Clear describes this concept as an inevitable experience. Preoccupation with the process rather than the goal can allow the individual to remain engaged and find ways to tweak their system to increase interest in the goal or minimize negative aspects. Clear tells the reader that remaining persistent will pay off in the long run.

Key Themes

Being Process Oriented

“You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems.” (Clear, 2018, p. 27)

For a habit to lead to lasting change, the book suggests that an individual must accept the habit as part of their identity. Focusing on a habit as a goal reinforces the separation between who you are and the person you want to be. According to Clear, goals are often limited in their parameters; either an individual is a success or a failure if the goal is or is not achieved. By being process-oriented, failures help the long-term learning process as opposed to stilting it. Not seeing results as quickly as expected will not keep the individual from continuing to practice a habit.

This theme indirectly relates to cost/financial strain. Clear notes that initial pocket-change to an individual living under impoverished circumstances can turn into a small or large fortune over time. As put by Clear, “living below your current means increases your purchasing power next month” (p. 131). The goal may temporarily seem out of reach but the active steps via saving can make the individual feel that they
are progressing. With a change in mindset, the small holds more weight. However, Clear does not explicitly incorporate an African American perspective.

Concerning heightened cultural mistrust, the theme is indirectly related. The theme can apply by diminishing tendencies to assume society is inherently negative. Being goal-oriented in this context, could give an African American individual some relief. However, by the next moment, relief can be gone and frustration at racism continuing to exist diminishes the individual’s desire to change. By being process-oriented, the African American individual can recognize the larger reasons for less reactive behavior: to be less anxious, less angry, etc.

**Awareness**

“The process of behavior change always starts with awareness.” (Clear, 2018, p. 67)

In order to change and take responsibility over their life, an individual must know what habits they currently perform. Then, the individual can determine which are or are not beneficial to the identity they’re choosing to reinforce. Clear (2018) discusses this in earlier chapters as “The Habits Scorecard” (p. 62). By noting which habits are good or bad for a given identity on a habits scorecard, the individual can bring unconscious habits into conscious awareness. Additionally, Clear suggests having an accountability partner as another way to maintain awareness. Bad habits and the consequences of feeding into them are examples mentioned.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Clear only mentions a brief list of habits on an example habits scorecard: wake up; turn off alarm; and check my phone among others. Over-spending on unnecessary items or failing to save could be included as well. Consequences for these actions can be defined on one’s own or between oneself and their accountability partner.
Concerning cultural mistrust, an individual who recognizes moment in which they were emotionally triggered by a racially charged interaction can begin to better manage their emotions. Practicing relaxation techniques in the moments it is needed most is one such way awareness can lead to increased emotional control. Consequences for not practicing awareness can be similarly determined between oneself and their accountability partner.

The Light We Carry, Michelle Obama (2022) – Race-Affirmative

Summary

Written with the COVID-19 pandemic and recent political news in mind, The Light We Carry discusses the ways in which individuals can avoid feeling lost or overwhelmed by reality. Michelle Obama draws on her experiences as a black woman, mother, political activist, and wife to showcase the different ways life has challenged her and the different ways she has overcome. Examples include Obama taking up knitting at the start of COVID-19. Doing so showed her how to diminish anxiety as well as how to return clarity to thought. Obama also suggests that readers practice being more kind to themselves and to others using the example of her friend’s husband, Ron, and Toni Morrison’s claim about the power of a smile. Other anecdotes address Obama’s identity as a black woman and the tropes attached to it. These analogies and anecdotes relay to the reader that stress does not have to be overwhelming and can be controlled through minor or major acts.

Key Themes

Authenticity
“I’m tall and that’s a good thing. I’m a woman and that’s a good thing. I’m Black and that’s a good thing. I am myself and that is a very good thing.” (Obama, 2022, p. 79)

Obama highlights the importance of accepting oneself and, then, being able to share that self with others. For example, Obama views Ron’s “Heeey, Buddy!” morning ritual to himself as more than a passing form of acknowledgment (2022, p. 60). It’s an acknowledgment that is given without conditions attached. Obama notes that this is especially important for those whose identity is tinged with controversy. She includes herself given her “black women” identity and the derogatory remarks made on its basis. Through acknowledging her differentness, Obama could no longer hide. Confidence could develop in the place of doubt. Our “self” will continue to be hurt if not.

This theme directly relates to heightened cultural mistrust. Here, Obama suggests that an African American individual who feels othered should begin to appreciate their uniqueness. Doing so prevents said individual from internalizing messages that do not serve them in the long run. Moreover, the individual can begin to appreciate the care they give to themselves that society could not or would not. Others around them similarly experiencing doubt and unworthiness given their race may begin to do the same. Concerning financial strain, this theme seems irrelevant. One could argue that an African American of poorer economic status could embrace authenticity in the sense of not attempting to appear as if they are financially well off. This does not mean to embrace poverty as if that is an economic destiny. Rather, to embrace to not end up in a worse financial position due to debt or other incurred expenses. If available, financial opportunities could be explored in the meantime.

Making Room For Others
“I saw myself in these girls—I’d grown up on the same streets, in the same public school system, around the same issues—and I was hopeful that they’d be able to see themselves in me.” (Obama, 2022, p. 34)

Obama talks about interpersonal relationships as essential to one’s wellbeing. First, because, it lessens the feeling of loneliness while reinforcing the feeling of shared humanity. Obama mentions this extensively when discussing her first playdate encounters with a friend, Denielle. She also mentions this when describing the conversations she had with young, African American women from the South and West Sides of Chicago. Second, because it teaches individuals how to take risks and embrace being uncomfortable. Less-than-ideal experiences allow individuals to know what it is liked to feel pushed and to better adapt. Obama references moments differentiating the temperaments between her two daughters, Sasha and Malia, and being aware to navigate them as separate individuals. Acceptance of the individual is what’s left.

This theme is indirectly related to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. An African American individual may misinterpret the intentions of a peer or stranger for being racially charged when the intentions were opposite. This is not to say boundaries should not be enforced. If not resulting in a consistent breach of boundaries, a willingness to accept an individual’s flawed nature helps in lessening cultural mistrust. Obama’s notion of shared humanity can be experienced. Concerning financial strain, this theme indirectly points towards its solutions. If an African American individual is open to seeking help—whether from government assistance or from family members—the strain can diminish greatly. Meanwhile, said individual can brainstorm ways to get back on their feet.


Summary
Greene lists principles, or “laws”, meant to help an individual avoid being taken advantage of in society and gain the social upper hand. Each law is complemented by historical examples of the law being observed and/or the law being ignored. For example, law 8 states, “get others to do the work for you, but always take the credit” (Greene, 1998, p. 133). Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison are used as historical examples of the law, the former ignoring it by failing to protect his scientific patents and the latter observing it by taking advantage of Tesla’s naivety. Law 12 states “use selective honesty and generosity to disarm your victim” (Green, 1998, p. 178). Observance of the law was illustrated by Victor Lustig feigning honesty and successfully conning Al Capone out of $5,000. Most, if not all, of said principles have a similarly individualistic, ruthless undertone. Others are more grounded in everyday affairs, such as Law 47’s suggestion to avoid overconfidence and Law 10’s suggestion to avoid associating with miserable individuals. Overall, Green’s 48 Laws of Power (1998) is a cutthroat how-to to success.

**Key Themes**

**Appeal To People’s Self-Interest**

“Always make those above you feel comfortably superior. In your desire to please and impress them, do not go too far in displaying your talents or you might accomplish the opposite: inspire fear and insecurity.” (Green, 1998, p. 31)

Greene’s depiction of humanity focuses on self-centeredness. He presumes that people are often too consumed with themselves to consider another’s viewpoint. Therefore, a person can be taken advantage of by an individual feigning interest in them. Once said person becomes comfortable and believes that their best interests are being considered, said individual may strike. The laws related to interpersonal
deceit through overt or covert flattery or sincerity—Law 1, Law 3, Law 7, Law 9, Law 10, Law 12, and onward—suggest as such. Greene describes freedom for the individual who does so successfully.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and financial strain. If an African American individual fakes friendship or cordiality with those who act prejudiced towards them, the African American individual may be able to lessen or eliminate the prejudice. Feelings of distrust or feeling racially attacked can diminish as well. However, variables such as the nature of the interaction—a stranger versus a work colleague, e.g.—make suggesting so difficult. A more aggressive form of the rule could be reporting a work colleague’s behavior to human resources if they continue to speak disrespectfully towards the African American individual. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual could successfully appeal to government policy or a specific individual for money using this technique. Doing so establishes a quid-pro-quo.

**Maintain Privacy**

“Keep people off-balance and in the dark by never revealing the purpose behind your actions.” (Greene, 1998, p. 56)

According to Greene, being private prevents one from appearing common/unimportant and prevents potential ulterior motives from surfacing. This is in line with the theme of appealing to people’s self-interest. If people prefer to be catered to by a mask that affirms their own interests, more often subtly than obviously, then an individual appealing to their interests can easier plot behind people’s backs. A person of interest will be too self-absorbed to notice nor understand. Hence, according to Law 4, said individual can appear powerful by not being easy to read. And according to Law 14, said individual can unsuspectingly gather intel on someone.
This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust. An African American individual who chooses not to engage with racist commentary seems better off. Potentially, the individual is less likely to become emotionally involved and for the racist commentator to use said individual’s emotions against them. Concerning cost/financial strain, this theme seems unrelated/unhelpful if external help is desired to resolve the issue. If not, and the individual simply wants to avoid stigma for not having as much as they think they should, then the theme provides indirect resolution.


Summary

Mackesy’s work is an illustrated book with 4 main characters: the boy, the mole, the fox, and the horse. The boy and mole are eventually joined by the fox and the horse on a journey with no stated destination. The characters share in conversation regarding existential topics such as the meaning of life, the meaning of happiness, the idea of progress and improvement, and the origins of fear. These conversations are expressed through short, pithy sayings. For example, the boy asks the mole, “what do you think success is?”, and the mole answers, “to love” (Mackesy, 2019, p. 21). The horse later mentions, “just take this step, the horizon will look after itself” (Mackesy, 2019, p. 133). And the fox admits to feeling like he has nothing to say (Mackesy, 2019, p. 93). Although heady in subject matter, Mackesy states that the book is presented to engage with both young and old readers.

Key Themes

Self-Love
“What do you think is the biggest waste of time?”

‘“Comparing yourself to others”, said the mole.’ (Mackesy, 2019, p. 26)

Similar sayings to the one above described the value of giving kindness to yourself as opposed to waiting for something or someone else to do so. In turn, as is often implied by the mole, the individual reclaims agency over themselves and their environment. This is difficult since, as the mole states, “often the hardest person to forgive is yourself” (Mackesy, 2019, p. 53).

This indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. An African American individual may be less affected by racist comments, or perceived racist comments, by affirming that what matters most is their self-perception. Being kind to oneself through positive affirmation or through engaging in activities one enjoys are ways of fostering self-love. Concerning cost/financial strain, this theme indirectly relates to resolving the issue through understanding long-term goals. Achieving those goals could require the individual to ask for help in finding better employment or managing unemployment. Hence, said individual understanding their financial needs versus those projected from others can be a form of practicing self-love.

Facing Fear

‘“Everyone is a bit scared”, said the horse.’

“But we are less scared together.” (Mackesy, 2019, p. 66)

Mackesy often mentions fear through the voices of his characters. The boy states, “imagine how we would be if we were less afraid” (Mackesy, 2019, p. 31). The mole states, “most of the old moles I know wish they had listened less to their fears and more to their dreams”
Fear is spoken of as ubiquitous. Mackesy implies that the emotion be managed by both taking risk and asking for help. The former can allow the individual to become comfortable with the uncomfortable. The latter allows for the individual experiencing fear to not feel as if they are alone.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust and perceived racism, an African American individual who views the world as all-around triggering and lacks hope in fostering interracial relationships may fear considering communicating with a white person or non-BIPOC. That fear may hold the individual back from opportunities to communicate with people they could have long-term relationships with. Furthermore, that fear may tarnish said individual’s general image of the world and leave them isolated. Engaging with the fear and having someone or a group of people to discuss their feelings with can help. Concerning financial strain, an individual might be afraid to ask for help. Particularly if self-reliance is a common quality among Americans, let alone African Americans. Understanding that asking for help is a sign of strength can mitigate fears of judgement.

The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck, Mark Manson (2016) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

Mark Manson offers a realist approach to self-help. He claims that humans’ fear of experiencing pain and caring too much about irrelevant ideas or concepts leads to life dissatisfaction. As a result, the individual is left with temporary pleasures and meaningless suffering. Manson’s solution for the reader is through the following question: “what pain do you want in your life…what are you willing to struggle for?” (Manson, 2016, p. 36) Following chapters in the book explain Manson’s take on the beliefs humanity holds to avoid suffering as well as
Manson’s explanation of the purpose and inevitability of suffering. Beliefs include the idea of being special rather than average and that external circumstances need to change before a person does. Manson breaks down these beliefs to remove their distortedness and states that pain should not be shied away from. Nonetheless, only by the reader breaking down their own version of beliefs themselves can they then create room to care about what is most important.

**Key Themes**

**Accountability**

“If you’re miserable in your current situation, chances are it’s because you feel like some part of it is outside your control—that there’s a problem you have no ability to solve, a problem that was somehow thrust upon you without your choosing.” (Manson, 2016, p. 49)

A major portion of Manson’s ethos deals with choice and the liberation experienced from recognizing its existence. Many individuals blame other people or other things for their misfortune. By doing so, control is no longer available to the individual. Exercising control falls on the external force an individual designates as the creator of their misery. Manson argues that taking the step to recognize one’s responsibility over their life allows for one’s values to be re-framed and misery to be alleviated. Failure can be re-framed as a way forward. Rejection can be re-framed as re-analyzing. Suffering can be re-framed as growth.

This is indirectly related to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual cannot control a person who has no problem telling them racial slurs and consequently becoming aggressive. Said African American individual can control how to navigate the situation in ways most beneficial to their mental health. This can be in the form of asking for help to
de-escalate the encounter or by removing themselves from the situation. Concerning financial strain, the same African American individual may be experiencing money strains due to being laid off. Recognizing that it is their responsibility to develop solutions to resolving the issue can alleviate the waiting game of “when will someone help me”.

**Accepting Imperfection**

“Just as Present Mark can look back on Past Mark’s every flaw and mistake, one day Future Mark will look back on Present Mark’s assumptions (including the contents of this book) and notice similar flaws.” (Manson, 2016, p. 61)

For Manson, one should accept life for what it is: replete with suffering. An individual’s ideal situation does not often pan out the way it was anticipated. Admitting the likelihood of being wrong about anything makes it easier to adapt and grow. To believe in an ideal such as “I am special” and that the world bends to one’s will would be to disregard reality. According to Manson, “people who feel entitled view every occurrence in their life as either an affirmation of, or a threat to, their own greatness” (Manson, 2016, p. 27). Abandoning such entitlement removes the individual from their perfect world perception and its constant disappointments to an imperfect world that acts as it is meant to act.

This is indirectly related to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust and perceived racism, an African American individual would accept that racism exists and isn’t likely to go away soon. As a result, the individual is better equipped to handle racially-charged encounters than to expect all encounters to be pleasant and non-confrontational. Concerning financial strain, accepting that an often racially exploitative economic system exists is important to an individual claiming potential financial freedom. Considering Manson’s ideology, this should not stop the individual from doing an honest assessment of how they do or do not fall short in meeting financial
goals in order to make necessary changes. Particularly if said changes aren’t the most ideal. The ideal image of financial freedom may need to be reinvented according to an individual’s circumstances.

As A Man Thinketh, James Allen (1902) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

Published during the Mind-Power/New Thought movement, As A Man Thinketh (Allen, 1902) argues that an individual’s thoughts create their reality. If an individual has limiting beliefs, success will seem out of reach. Vice-versa for beliefs that reinforce an individual’s capacity to achieve their goals. To have only positive thoughts, however, is not enough. The individual must accompany thought with matched action to see their ideal manifest in physical reality. For example, Allen mentions an impoverished youth laborer who mentally creates an ideal life. Doing so pushed the youth to work towards its fruition despite the limited means he had initially (Allen, 1902). This is because the ideal is experienced instantaneously through mind and is, henceforth, acted upon.

Key Themes

Power of Mind

“...may a man tend the garden of his mind, weeding out all the wrong, useless, and impure thoughts, and cultivating toward perfection the flowers and fruits of right, useful, and pure thoughts.” (Allen, 1902, p. 20)
According to Allen, an individual attracts what they are and not what they want. What they are is determined by the thoughts the individual continuously holds. In turn, accountability falls on the individual as opposed to external circumstances. The individual becomes the cause of their unmet desires rather than something external to said individual.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual may believe it is impossible to remain calm when they feel discriminated against. For this example, discrimination leans toward microaggressions rather than macroaggressions. By the individual re-framing their perception of the situation—that they are ultimately responsible for their emotions—navigating that and similar situations becomes easier. Concerning financial strain, if the same individual believes they’re incapable of escaping poverty, it becomes harder for them to act in ways counter to this belief. By believing otherwise, the individual may then feel more empowered to look for solutions to their financial burdens.

**Power of Action**

“*Gifts, powers, material, intellectual, and spiritual possessions are the fruits of effort; they are thoughts completed, objects accomplished, visions realized.*” (Allen, 1902, p. 38)

According to Allen, having positive thoughts around attaining one’s goal doesn’t equate to an easiness in physically achieving them. Setbacks are inevitable since the world ultimately operates outside of an individual’s/individuals’ control. Through thought management and having an ideal to strive for, the individual can withstand these setbacks. Otherwise, the physical aspect of one’s ideal could not be attained.
Acquiring a large amount of money may require learning skills an individual had never thought to learn before. The same can be said for becoming a better communicator or better lover. Achieving an individual’s ideals necessitates action.

This theme indirectly relates to the issues of heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, becoming psychologically disaffected by petty instances of racial aggression requires a change in mindset and testing the strength of that mindset under pressure. Testing a mindset’s strength can occur under circumstances an individual knows they’ll experience microaggressions or similar. At work or at school, are examples. This is not to say an African American individual should engage with an aggressive, violent racist when the risk of harm outweighs psychological reward. Otherwise, this is similar to the idea of stress inoculation: increasing exposure to the trigger lessens the intensity of a triggered response (Saunders et al., 1996). Concerning financial strain, an African American individual could act towards the ideal of financial freedom, for example, by doing a job search or receiving assistance from friends, family, a social worker, etc.

The Café On The Edge of The World, John Strelecky (2020) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

The Café On The Edge of The World takes place in a remote café after John, the main character, and his original plans to travel to recharge backfire. Stuck on the interstate on his way to an unnamed destination, John decides to re-route to get around traffic. His plan backfires for the second time once ending up on an unknown road with a malfunctioning GPS system and little gas. There, John find himself at the Café of Questions where food and existential thought are provided. The café’s menu asks each customer three questions: “why are you here?”, “are you afraid of death?”, and “are you fulfilled?” (Strelecky, 2020, p. 19). Initially hesitant to engage with these questions, John becomes more
comfortable as his waitress, Casey, and the cook, Mike, guide him through the self-discovery process. Through multiple conversations about finding one’s purpose and avoiding people, places, or things that take you away from it, John leaves the café with an idea of how to uncover his purpose: doing things that he liked and doing things he had never tried before.

*Key Themes*

**Purpose-For-Existing**

“If your definition of helping people means joining the medical profession, do that. If it means building shelters in an impoverished area, do that. Maybe you feel becoming an accountant and assisting people with their taxes is the way you want to help. Then do that.” (Strelecky, 2020, p. 34)

Waitress Casey notes that an individual’s purpose-for-existing, or PFE, is determined by the individual. John initially thought it was determined by cultural pressures or people’s opinions. However, as the “are you fulfilled?” question suggests, creating a purpose around others’ expectations is less likely to lead to personal satisfaction. Limitations to achievement are created when thinking within the confines of an individual’s current environment. By doing the opposite and following their personal desires, life becomes more purposeful. Also, an individual should be mindful of remaining open to experiences that could better elucidate their purpose or add to their purpose.

This theme indirectly relates to the issue of heightened cultural mistrust. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual may avoid seeking opportunities they desire because of potential social blowback. This can induce feelings of not belonging or worthlessness. The individual can counter these feelings by realizing that their personal desires do not have to agree with those from others. Their desires and
perception of themselves take precedent. Dealing with possibly hostile social environments becomes easier. Concerning cost/financial strain, this theme at first seems unrelated/unhelpful. Strelecky’s character do not speak of money itself as purpose-fulfilling. It is considered a secondary gain to any inner goal—love, validation, confidence, etc. If by incorporating reasons for acquiring money into the “how-to” of acquiring money, then the theme seems more aligned. An African American individual may work on their passion of becoming a chef while they keep financially afloat with a menial job.

**Openness**

“...we all have the chance to expand our exposure to things—to give us a better perspective on all that’s out there.” (Strelecky, 2020, p. 52)

Strelecky’s characters reiterate that finding purpose requires branching beyond an individual’s current environment. The activities an individual thinks they like may only be a product of their environment. Or, the activities they continue to like become more nuanced and personalized after exposure to and taking aspects from the activities’ different iterations. Waitress Casey gives the example of an individual interested in building sportscars. Doing so would require exposure to not only one type of sports car nor one way of building it. Rather, an individual should expose themselves to different types of sportscars and different building techniques. With broader knowledge, the individual can choose a particular aspect of sportscar building they like, focus on it, and individualize it.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual’s expectation for racially-charged encounters can prevent them from developing relationships. Non-black people may be looked at
through a lens of distrust, which makes establishing intimacy difficult. By being open to interracial relationships, even if the risk of discrimination exists, healthier relationships can be established and the individual’s personal anxieties surrounding interracial encounters can diminish. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual may believe that there’s stigma in accepting aid from government institutions or from friends. The do-it-yourself mindset pervades American culture, let alone African American culture. Opening up to help-seeking could not only financially help, but also emotionally benefit.

The Highly Sensitive, Judy Dyer (2018) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

Dyer describes the typical characteristics found in a highly sensitive person (HSP). Characteristics include trouble handling conflict and criticism, a need to regularly recharge alone, an ability to pick up on people’s moods and emotions, and difficulty to refuse others’ requests for fear of hurting their feelings. These and other characteristics reflect an individual’s ability to attune to an environments and those that exist within it as well as the ability to detect disharmony occurring in both. However, if the individual is unable to differentiate themselves and their feelings from an environment and those within it, then feeling overwhelmed can occur. Dyer recommends certain practices to prevent overwhelm such as meditating, accepting feelings of anxiety to let them pass, and setting boundaries. New-Age practices such as reiki healing—a healer uses their hands to move stagnant energy within the client’s body—and smudging—lighting a bundle of sage or stick of palo santo and letting its smoke release into a room—are recommended as well to re-establish the mind-body connection. Moreover, Dyer’s defining characters of an HSP as well as HSP recommendations for managed living help HSP’s navigate career choice and parenting.
Key Themes

Acceptance

“Just bear in mind that, as an HSP, you can’t help but process the world in a deeper, arguably more meaningful way than the majority of the population.” (Dyer, 2018, p. 19)

Dyer’s book isn’t suggesting the HSP change who they are. She notes that it’s likely impossible for the HSP to even do so. Rather, Dyer’s advice is meant to make the HSP’s environment better adapted to their qualities. For example, Dyer lists counselor and writer as careers geared towards an HSP’s empathic and conscientious tendencies. Similar goes for Dyer’s recommendation to an HSP parent who may feel overstimulated caring for a young child. Expressing this concern to their partner and developing a shared-system of care can work.

This indirectly relates to resolving cultural mistrust, perceived racism, and financial strain.

Concerning heightened cultural mistrust, an African American individual can accept their African American identity as something that cannot be changed. Doing so can lessen distrust or suspicion by the individual being less likely to care what people think of them. Concerning cost/financial strain, an African American individual’s acceptance of their current finances can lead to recognizing solutions. For example, an individual accepts the reality that his employer has been overly garnishing his paycheck. Steps can be taken to stop that from occurring such as quitting or reporting garnishment to a higher authority.

Setting Boundaries

“Boundaries let other people know what you will and will not accept from them.” (Dyer, 2018, p. 29)
If maintaining environmental and social harmony is in the interest of an HSP, then people-pleasing is more likely to ensue. According to Dyer, social conflict can make an HSP “feel overwhelmed, and the aftereffects can last for days.” (Dyer, 2018, p. 28). Yet, knowing how to effectively engage with conflict through understanding and self-control prepares the HSP for future encounters. Communication skills and the ability to say no to mistreatment are strengthened.

This theme indirectly relates to the issues of heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual who feels as if they’re being discriminated can voice their concerns to who they think is triggering them. If needed, removing themselves from the situation reinforces the boundary’s strength. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual may feel obligated to take on more work for lower pay. Either requesting higher pay at their current job or searching for work elsewhere are ways of setting financial boundaries.

The Land Of The Gods, H.P. Blavatsky (2022) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

The Land Of The Gods is a mystical account of Blavatsky’s experience with the Masters of Wisdom, known as the Shambhala. This recent edition is a revision of its first publishing in 1887 and its following publishing in 1910. Taking place within the Himalayan mountains and the Alps, Blavatsky comes across a dwarf who leads her to an adept knowledgeable in universal truths. Said adept belongs to the Rosicrucian Order—an organized occultist society—who explains to Blavatsky the meaning of universal truth generally. Universal truth refers to the understanding of the inner and outer world and how the inner world precedes the outer. The adept explains this through the concept of human
imagination—thoughts create reality—and the process of alchemy—turning base metal into gold. By the book’s end, Blavatsky realizes that her experience with the adept occurred in a state of pure consciousness. Her body had been asleep next to a large pine tree. Upon waking up, the dream was confirmed real once she felt pieces of gold from an alchemy demonstration in her pocket.

*Key Themes*

**An Invisible Reality**

“...therefore your science is based entirely upon external illusions and is consequently a superficial and illusive science, knowing nothing about inner life, which is far more important than external phenomena.” (Blavatsky, 2022, p. 41)

According to the Adepts in Blavatsky’s story, the truth of life and reality can only be grasped through individual understanding via intellect and intuition. Said truth is that the individual’s will has the power to control matter with the soul. In colloquial terms, the individual’s thoughts control reality. This is only possible if the individual’s thoughts are in alignment with Universal oneness.

This theme indirectly relates to cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Similar to As A Man Thinketh (1902), an African American individual can avoid the emotional distress of racially-charged encounters by challenging thoughts that reinforce the emotion. “I am angry, and I want to hurt this person” can become “I am angry, but I know this moment will pass”. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual may reinforce thoughts about being poor. “I will never get out of these circumstances”, is an example of such thoughts. By challenging those thoughts, the individual can return agency to themselves. “I might be hard-pressed right now, but asking for help might make my situation better”, positively reframes the previous statement.
**Dominating Our Animal Instincts**

“To become conquerors over Nature, we must fight our battles and not wait until nature fights them for us.” (Blavatsky, 2022, p. 99)

Initially, Blavatsky thought that occultism and mysticism belonged to individuals who thought in the abstract for its own sake. However, the Adept explains that spiritual enlightenment requires making one’s rational and spiritual capacities stronger than their emotional desires. To become stronger in mind, body, and soul, there must be resistance. If there isn’t, the Adept suggests seeking circumstances in which the mind, body, and/or soul are tested. The individual will connect to their divine nature through this process, which can either happen quickly or slowly.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual’s goal in racially charged situations can be to successfully shift from an angered emotional state to a calm or neutral emotional state. The individual can seek to not feel triggered to begin with. As the Adept implies, a single instance of successfully resisting one’s emotions is usually not enough to never feel triggered by something again. Rather, the point becomes to expect resistance under such emotionally taxing circumstances and to use such circumstances to grow. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual may desire giving up their job search or seeking other ways to achieve financial security. In the moment, and immediate moments after, not succumbing to emotions of hopelessness or despair may seem pointless. In the long term, overcoming those emotional moments may amount to resiliency if not financial gains.

Awaken To Your True Self, Andrew Daniel (2022) – Non Race-Affirmative

*Summary*
Daniel’s claims begin with examining the stories individuals tell themselves. Stories include thinking they’re worthless, thinking they’ve hit rock bottom and cannot get back up, or thinking a new relationship will never follow a break-up. And the same can be said for their positive counterparts: thinking they’re special, thinking they’re in the best position to move forward; or thinking that a break-up is setting them up for something better. For Daniel, reality exists without value judgements. Without them, the individual can be more flexible in navigating the ups and downs of their inner and outer life. An individual’s negative and positive traits become sources of both negative and positive insights. Daniel illustrates the pitfalls of being quick to judge a circumstance as good or bad through exploring the victim mentality, being narcissistic, being action-oriented, and overreliance on the intellect. His final suggestions tell the individual that to accomplish lasting growth, an individual must have a continuous resolve to understand themselves and to grow.

**Key Themes**

**Accountability**

“Nobody can give you your power, and nobody can take it away from you. It is your choice.” (Daniel, 2022, p. 195)

Daniel talks extensively about the victim mentality as being a major root of one’s suffering. That good or bad external circumstances only exist in the mind of the individual. Daniel says this not to suggest that what happens to an individual is always their fault. For example, an individual whose had a gun put to their head likely didn’t desire that to happen. Nonetheless, the individual retains choice in the form of choosing to comply or to resist and die. Most examples Daniel provides are of the less extreme type: feeling obligated to maintain a friendship,
feeling sorry for oneself, feeling justified in believing the world isn’t an accepting place. By accepting these feelings as not inevitable but rather as choices, the individual has the freedom to decide for themselves how their life should be.

This indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust and perceived racism, an African American individual who gets triggered by possibly racially-charged interactions has the power to re-interpret their meaning. Instead of becoming triggered, the individual can develop the understanding that no one else may take away their dignity or confidence. Especially a stranger. Concerning financial strain, an African American may feel similarly hopeless when facing job insecurity and potentially poverty. Re-framing the circumstance to become one of opportunity—for example, “now I have the chance to find my passion or ask others for help”—can breed productive action and can lessen mental stress.

**Avoiding Reality**

“*Suffering isn’t the tragedy itself; it’s the drama, noise, and hysteria we create about it.*” *(Daniel, 2022, p. 149)*

Daniel’s claims about stories create an image of reality that involves meaningless pain and endless suffering. An individual might tell themselves that being themselves will lead to emotional betrayal. However, if the narrative were let go of, the suffering associated with being themselves would likely be gone. The individual would feel inclined to see themselves for who they are and may feel more confident opening up to others. Other claims about reality surrounding blame and perfectionism work similarly. In turn, the individual becomes conscious of how they superimpose their feelings onto life. Without this consciousness, however, the individual mistakes reality with their value judgements and doesn’t seek to change.
This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual may believe they cannot trust white people, or other non-BIPOC, because there seems no other way to view reality. This is not to say that the African American individual should get rid of all feelings of distrust, but ones that severely disable them from navigating everyday interracial encounters. Concerning financial strain, an African American individual may believe that they’re destined to remain in poverty or destined to be taken advantage of in work settings. If the individual realizes their part in playing into this narrative by believing it, potential solutions may crop up that are within their control.

The Empowered Empath, Judy Dyer (2019) – Non Race-Affirmative

Summary

Dyer defines an empath as an individual who understands a person not only by their words and actions, but also by their energy. Energy refers to an individual’s aura or energetic field which reveals an individual’s emotional state. Without regulating their flow of energy, an empath likely becomes overwhelmed by the different energies they’re experiencing. As put by Dyer (2019), an empath’s “…energy is constantly interacting with other people’s energy, regardless of space, time, or distance…” (p. 11) Resultant issues can take the form of headaches, digestive issues, anxiety, and chronic depression. Dyer offers tips on how empaths can better navigate these issues and life generally. For example, finding health practitioners educated in energy work, practicing daily yoga, embracing independence and developing assertiveness, and challenging negative self-talk. Through such practices, Dyer believes that any empath can improve their life.

Key Themes
Coping With Emotions

“Living as an empath is like being on a constant emotional roller-coaster...The good news is that it is possible to control your emotions. You don’t need to live in a state of constant turmoil.” (Dyer, 2019, p. 32)

Dyer’s multiple tips help the empathic individual adapt to life. Lessening expectations for others, for example, allows the individual to be more flexible in their social interactions. If the empath is talking to a person who seemingly refuses to understand the empathic identity, lashing out can be replaced with letting go of the conversation. Cognitive behavioral therapy can address this type of inner and outer conflict too, and Dyer notes that many CBT books are available for solo-use. Restoring energy is also discussed; Dyer mentions acupuncture and meditation. Unless the empathic reader wants to become a social hermit, they can at least consider Dyer’s life. The same goes for individuals who do not identify as empaths.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual can manage negative interracial encounters by managing their emotions. If a person calls them by a racial slur, for example, said individual can choose whether or not to engage in their immediate emotional response. Instead of choosing anger and violence, the individual may choose indifference and to leave the encounter entirely. Concerning cost/financial strain, an African American individual may feel overwhelmed by their lack of money and/or a lack of support to acquire it. Self-managing their emotions can allow the individual to approach their financial issues from a more rational headspace.

Becoming Assertive
“[Assertiveness] will ensure that you don’t allow others to walk all over you and that you are capable of standing up for yourself when necessary.” (Dyer, 2019, p. 28)

According to Dyer, empaths are more likely to be taken advantage of by appealing more to other people’s emotions than their own. Doing so decreases the chances of conflict occurring. However, the long-term consequences of always catering to others are great. As previously mentioned, consequences include digestive issues, anxiety, and chronic depression. By an empath being assertive about what they do or do not need, said issues can be avoided.

This theme indirectly relates to heightened cultural mistrust and cost/financial strain. Concerning cultural mistrust, an African American individual can act assertively when their personal boundaries feel threatened. If a non-Black person seems to be racially antagonizing said individual, and depending on the context, the individual can enforce consequences such as not speaking to that person anymore or, for example, reporting their behavior to an office supervisor. Concerning financial strain, using the office example again, an African American individual can develop their assertiveness whenever they feel they’re being financially exploited. This can occur within a work-setting or by family or friends. At work, reporting the issue can be the best course of action. For family or friends, letting the individual know what is wrong and/or cutting ties could be best.

Discussion

For all the selected books, the author categorized the identified themes as belonging in one of three categories: general, meaning the theme appeared in all or most (6 or more) books; typical, meaning the theme appeared in some (3-5) books; and variant, meaning the theme appeared in
1 to 2 books. Concerning the general category, accountability was the only theme identified. Accountability refers to the responsibility one has to oneself. This includes knowing what is and what is not within one’s control. For example, an individual’s emotions are considered their responsibility. The books that overtly reflect this theme include Goggins’s Never Finished (2022), Manson’s The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck (2016), and Daniel’s Awaken To Your True Self (2022). In Never Finished (2022), Goggins implies living out a victim mentality is unproductive if the goal is to turn one’s life around. By an individual owning their problems/traumas, they can now provide the solutions that others and the world at large seemed unwilling to give. In The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck (2016), Manson describes accountability in similar fashion. According to Manson, if an individual feels that they are suffering, the feeling may be due in part to their belief that the source of their suffering is outside of their control. Manson’s solution is cognitive re-framing, from which an individual may not only realize that the value judgement they placed on an act or idea can be reversed, but also that the ability to change our value judgements means said act or idea isn’t inherently bad or good. In turn, what was originally suffering becomes a chance to experience personal growth. In Awaken To Your True Self (2022), Daniel discusses accountability explicitly using the term “victim mentality” (p. 164). The same idea from Goggins and Manson follows: by believing that external factors are solely responsible for your wellbeing, you give up the immediate power to help yourself. Daniel takes this concept a step further by discussing an individual choosing to remain in a victim mentality because they fear change.

Still referring to the general category, five related themes from five additional books, respectively, were included as variations of accountability. Said books include Greene’s The 48 Laws of Power (1998), Dyer’s The Highly Sensitive (2018) and The Empowered Empath (2019), Blavastky’s The Land of The Gods (2022), and Strelecky’s The Café on the Edge of the World (2020). The theme "maintaining privacy"
appears in Greene’s The 48 Laws of Power (1998). Maintaining one’s privacy allows the individual to not only take better advantage of others, but also to prevent them from being taken advantage other. Doing so aligns with accountability since, according to Greene, no one else owes you anything but yourself. Dyer’s The Highly Sensitive (2018) explores accountability through the theme "setting boundaries”. Knowing how to say no to family, friend, or work demands, according to Dyer, allows the highly sensitive person to recognize the control they have over their wellbeing and the ability to better themselves without external aid. Dyer similarly touches on accountability in The Empowered Empath (2019). Through the theme “becoming assertive”, Dyer encourages her empathic readers to say no to physically and emotionally taxing actions. Saying no to going to a party, for example, to avoid intermingling with too many energies. In Blavatsky’s The Land of the Gods (2022), accountability is explored through the theme of dominating one’s animal instincts. To do so, the goal being enlightenment or heightened intuition, the individual must recognize that they’re the source of their impulses and only they can mitigate said impulses’ influence. Finally, Strelecky’s theme “purpose for existing” conveys accountability by pushing protagonist John to identify his life’s purpose (2020). No one else, as put by waitress Casey, can do that for John; only he can do that for himself (Strelecky, 2020).

Concerning the typical category, three themes were identified across the study sample: acceptance in 4 books, awareness in 4 books, and resilience in 3 books. Acceptance, somewhat similar to accountability, refers to an individual knowing what they can and cannot change and embracing the unchangeable. Dyer, in The Highly Sensitive (2018), and Manson (2016) overtly explore this theme. Dyer encourages the highly sensitive reader to accept rather than feel ashamed for being as they are. The reader should find ways to adapt their environment to their unique traits. For example, choosing career paths, such as counselor and writer, fit to the reader’s empathic tendencies. Manson (2016) discusses
acceptance insofar of humans not being perfect creatures. To Manson (2016), it seems inevitable that an individual makes mistakes and accepting this inevitability as reality allows an individual to better persevere. Obama’s The Light We Carry (2022) and Mackesy’s The Boy, The Mole, The Fox, and The Horse (2019) explore acceptance through the synonymous themes of authenticity and self-love, respectively. Obama notes the effort made to accept her tallness, her blackness, and her womanliness and how she chose to share these qualities with the world (2022). Confidence grew from doing so, and Obama suggests her readers do the same (2022). Mackesy’s titular characters similarly explore acceptance through the importance of self-love (2019). Through, for example, not comparing oneself to others and learning how to forgive oneself (2019).

Concerning awareness, the second theme within the typical category and referring to an individual knowing their physical and/or mental habits, four books addressed the theme. Said books include Clear’s Atomic Habits (2018), Allen’s As A Man Thinketh (1902), Blavatsky’s The Land of the Gods (2022), and Dyer’s The Empowered Empath (2019). In Atomic Habits (2018), Clear discusses awareness as an important tool to recognizing one’s bad habits so one can replace them with good habits. Articulated through the theme “power of mind”, Allen (1902) presents awareness as a tool to weed out the thoughts incongruent to one’s desired self. Blavatsky (2022) similarly touches on awareness through the theme “invisible reality”, referring to the mind’s faculty to explore what physical reality fails to offer. Blavatsky’s (2022) approach is more mystical but takes on the same premise as Allen’s (1902) insofar of emphasizing the mind’s influence on reality and the importance of controlling it. In Dyer’s The Empowered Empath (2019), awareness manifests through the theme of coping with emotions. Doing so requires a willingness to self-analyze through, for example, CBT exercises, or practicing meditation (Dyer, 2019).
Concerning resilience, the third theme within the typical category and referring to an individual’s ability to move forward despite facing failure and hardship, three books addressed the theme. Said books include Goggins’s Never Finished (2022), Mackesy’s The Boy, The Mole, The Fox, and The Horse (2019), and Allen’s As A Man Thinketh (1902). For Goggins (2022), resilience appeared as he chose to undergo significant hardship for the sake of toughening his mindset. Goggins turning his life around by losing more than 100 pounds to qualify for pararescueman training, for example, conveys such resilience. For Mackesy (2019), resilience appears as the boy and the mole discuss the possibilities available to them by facing their fear. Mackesy’s characters also discuss the significance of support systems, mitigating the stress of facing one’s fears (2019). For Allen (1902), resilience appears as the individual understands the work needed to make ideas into reality. The process can be arduous, but many “…do not see the trials and failures and struggles which these men have voluntarily encountered in order to gain their experience” (Allen, 1902, p. 37).

Concerning the variant category, five themes were identified from five different books: “making room for others” from Obama’s The Light We Carry (2022); “being process oriented” from Clear’s Atomic Habits; “appeal to people’s self-interest” from Greene’s The 48 Laws of Power; “avoiding reality” from Daniel’s Awaken To Your True Self (2022); and “openness” from Strelecky’s The Café on the Edge of the World (2020). The theme “making room for others” stresses the importance of interpersonal relationships (Obama, 2022). Obama, for example, met with a group of young black girls from a school in Chicago in hopes of inspiring and offering comfort to them given the current socio-political climate. The theme “being process oriented” differentiates goal-driven from process-driven (Clear, 2018). Compared to the former, an individual that reflects the latter is unlikely to perpetuate bad habits by recognizing what does and doesn’t contribute to their goal being realized (Clear,
2018). In turn, success becomes more likely (Clear, 2018). The theme “appeal to people’s self-interest” refers to taking advantage of individuals’ narcissistic tendencies (Greene, 1998). For Greene, doing so allows an individual to better manipulate those around them to said individual’s benefit (1998). The theme “avoiding reality” refers to individuals repeating personal narratives that allow them to avoid responsibility over themselves and their life (Daniel, 2022). If individuals abandon the stories that amplify their pain or suffering, suggests Daniel, their pain or suffering would lessen substantially (2022). Finally, Strelecky’s theme “openness” encourages readers to intentionally seek the unfamiliar. Doing so can breed knowledge that helps an individual, like the protagonist John, find their purpose-for-existing (Strelecky, 2020).

Speaking broadly of what the groupings suggest, individual-oriented themes appeared most often throughout the sample. This is particularly true for the general and typical groups, in which the themes identified were recounted from an individual perspective of benefit rather than a communal perspective of benefit. Exceptions include one from the typical group—“facing fear” from Mackesy (2019) in which communal support is mentioned—and two from the variant group—“appeal to people’s self-interest” from Greene (1998) and “making room for others” from Obama (2022). This appears to reinforce the individualistic ethos surrounding self-help as identified in its beginning with Benjamin Franklin and even onward (Franklin, 1986; Effing, 2009). Further considerations concern the study’s two research questions: is a book race-affirmative, and is a book able to address the factors of economic insecurity and heightened cultural mistrust within African American communities?

The term race-affirmative refers to books that offer black readers a positive way to frame their black identity. Never Finished (Goggins, 2022) and The Light We Carry (Obama, 2022) overtly adopt this stance. Goggins (2022) argued that sulking over his childhood experiences
encounters with children of Ku Klux Klan members as well as his strained relationship with his father would not have resolved his traumas. He alone had to resolve them (Goggins, 2022). Goggins (2022) embraced his racial difference and the hate spewed against him to become one of the few black Navy SEALs and pass Army Ranger School. Obama (2022) discussed how her intersecting identities as black, woman, mother, wife, and social activist contributed to her worst worries yet best moments of growth. For example, cognitively re-framing the angry black women trope placed on her during Barack Obama’s presidency allowed her to better lean into self-confidence and assertiveness (Obama, 2022). “Going high” when others attempted to take her down, as Michelle Obama puts it (2022, p. 186).

Goggins (2022) and Obama (2022) divulge their experiences in ways that affirm the power of their racial identity, turning it into something worthy of praise rather than shame. African American readers who can relate through similar experiences could experience feelings of kinship and a greater willingness to practically apply either author’s suggestions. Conversely, the remaining ten books do not offer a race-affirmative ethos. Said books seem intended to apply to a general audience; any individual can take what they want from the literature. This is not to say that the remaining tens books are of little to no use for African American readers. Rather, by being broad, their content could be just as useful as the content coming from David Goggins or Michelle Obama. This becomes apparent by connecting Goggins’s and Obama’s advice to the advice presented in the remaining ten books, each book able to address cultural mistrust and economic insecurity.

Regarding cultural mistrust, both are directly addressed by Goggins and Obama respectively. An African American individual could apply the life lessons offered by both authors through understanding a racist encounter is not their fault. Goggins does so through a hard-knocks approach; Obama from a motherly desire to nurture healthy self-concepts in her readers. However, both return to the individual’s responsibility
to manage their emotions. Albeit Goggins and Obama do address the factor indirectly, similar can be said for financial strains. It is not an African American individual’s fault that they grew up in poverty. However, it is their responsibility to determine how not to continue perpetuating poverty. Whether that mean living beyond one’s means to force oneself to make money, an implicit Goggins approach, or by having a support system to temporarily fall back on, an implicit Obama approach, the individual must determine the best course of action for themselves. Of course, suggesting so is easier said than done. The remaining literature can apply in similar fashion. Clear’s (2018) breakdown of habit formation—cue, craving, response, and reward—and Allen’s (1902) breakdown of goal setting—hold positive ideas in mind and take matched action--can help African American readers re-frame their race-based and financial-based perceptions. Similar can be said for Blavatsky’s The Land of the Gods (2022) which discusses the mind and subduing animal instincts. All three books suggest the power of cognitive re-framing a mental habit and disengaging from triggering situations outside of their control. Greene’s (1998) laws on keeping one’s privacy and being action-oriented ties well with Goggins’s (2022) accountability mantras and “no excuses” work-ethic. Similar can be said for Manson’s (2016) “choose your struggle” call-to-action (p. 27) and Daniel’s (2022) push for readers to stop dramatizing their pain. Like Goggins and Obama, cultural mistrust would be addressed through an awareness of what is outside of an African American individual’s control. The same would apply for addressing economic distress; what is within the reader’s power to positively change their economic situation?

whose workers guide protagonist John down the path of self-acceptance and accountability. Questions to encourage John’s self-awareness are asked like how Obama speaks to and questions her readers: tactfully and through personal experiences of triumph (Obama, 2022; Strelecky, 2020). Mackesy (2019) and Dyer (2018, 2019) similarly encourages self-analysis through an approach of self-compassion and understanding. Facing fear and self-love are worked through at the pace of the individual (Mackesy, 2019). For Dyer, the individual takes their introspection to the level of honoring their empathic capabilities (Dyer, 2018, 2019). Again, cultural mistrust would be addressed through individual responsibility over emotions and over economic distress. Again, to the extent the latter is possible. An African American reader can take from any of the ten books as they could from Goggins, Obama, or otherwise. However, for those who are seeking explicitly race-related advice, these remaining ten books fall short. As put by black commentator Rebecca Stevens (2021), questions such as “how do I make sure I am respected by my white colleagues…how to avoid becoming a token” are left unanswered (para. 7). According to Michael Rowland (2001), Africentric self-help books could address this gap in African American perspectives on success and emotional wellbeing. Said books are purported to help African Americans achieve “successful lives and professions ‘in white America’, while still maintaining [an] African American identity (p. 2). In turn, an African American’s multicultural identity is wholly acknowledged in ways self-help books like the ones previously discussed do not (Rowland, 2001)

Overall, the analysis suggests that self-help books can be a viable alternative or supplement to traditional mental health treatments for African Americans. Whether or not a book was written by an African American and/or particularly catered to the African American experience has minimal effect on the book’s relevance from the perspective of addressing mistrust and economic distress. Each book was open enough to
interpreting solutions to cultural mistrust, perceived racism, and financial strain. The themes of acceptance and accountability can allow African Americans to understand what is and what isn’t within their control: the attitudes of others and the state of their finances, respectively. Choice in author tone—nurturing, blunt, or neutral—is also available to the reader. However, some African American readers may dislike the lack of race-affirmative undertones among the books identified as lacking it in the literature sample. Said books may be deemed useless for not offering advice related to race’s social implications (Rowland, 2001; Stevens, 2021). Furthermore, terminology used to describe psychological aptitude or success may put off African American readers as well. As previously noted, majority of the chosen self-help texts were individual oriented with an occasional “community support” undertone. Considering self-help origins, this is unsurprising (Effing, 2009; Franklin, 1791/2020). Shawn Ginwright (2018), author and Professor of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University, notes this phenomenon while discussing the popularity of youth resilience building in the 1990s and 2000s as well as the implications of trauma-informed care prior to his re-coinining of the term. For Ginwright (2018), both imply a focus on the individual as the primary solution to their suffering. Resiliency through its emphasis on an individual’s ability to adapt to their environment; trauma-informed care through its emphasis on suffering as an individual experience versus a collective phenomenon (Ginright, 2018). Ginwright (2018) introduces the concept of “healing-centered” engagement to combat the lack of collective accountability for traumas experienced by minority individuals (para. 10). Youth Thrive, an initiative undertaken by the Center for the Study of Social Policy, has taken healing-centered engagement and applied its tenets to engage with youth through the use of “culture, spirituality, civic action, and collection healing (Ginwright, 2018; Soto-Aponte, 2021). Examples of application include “healing circles rooted in indigenous culture and drumming circles found in some African cultures” (Soto-Aponte, 2021). In turn, the African American individual may
feel less burdened by their traumas knowing that community support is available. If self-help literature increasingly diversifies its advice, e.g., incorporating community-based approaches as much as those individually-based, self-help literature can be helpful as well. This is said in reference to top-rated self-help books such as those used for this study. With Michelle Obama and David Goggins on Amazon’s general self-help’s best sellers list, the genre’s top-ranking titles may become more diverse in writing about black identity and life ideologies—ones less rooted in individualism—while continuing to attract an African American consumer base.

Concerning additional limitations, this study is a single, qualitative study of a small sample of self-help literature. And as a qualitative study run by presumptions of the black experience, albeit provided by a black individual, the reader must take into consideration the limited scope to determining a book’s relevance. Follow-up studies should be both quantitative/qualitative and/or include a larger sample of self-help literature. Additionally, an exhaustive criteria list for categorizing a book’s relevance should be implemented. For example, including additional factors causing poor mental health in the African American community such as drug dependence, incarceration, and comorbidity cases (e.g., anxiety and alcoholism) (Noonan et al., 2016). Said factors’ nuance should be highlighted as well. The factor “cultural mistrust” has a charged history that requires its resolution to be made not only in the hands of African Americans, but also the system that perpetuates said history. This becomes even more significant when considering medical mistrust, another iteration of cultural mistrust. Given the sample of top-rated self-help literature, this is particularly important to note if race’s influence on mental health goes largely unmentioned. Best-sellers, presumed better by ratings alone, need not be the best type of self-help literature an African American individual can engage with. In turn, inquiry into self-help readership among African Americans is necessary. If not best sellers, what type of self-help literature are African American individuals consuming?
previously mentioned, this study’s sample of self-help literature may be deemed useless by some African Americans. However, this does not mean that African Americans avoid self-help literature entirely. Inspirative biographies such as those on Assata Shakur and Malcolm X seem to be considered, although they are not explicitly categorized as self-help (Guy, 2005; Johnson, 2012; X et al., 1965/1992). This calls into question not only who reads self-help literature, but also how flexible its definition can be. Hence, including not only other self-help book ranking platforms such as The New York Times and/or lengthening the period of time from which top-ranked titles come from, but also self-help titles actually read by African American readers that may not be on such lists is necessary. Doing both would develop a more critical approach to determining book relevance. Returning to the broader issues of cost and cultural mistrust, cultural mistrust’s newer iteration (i.e., medical mistrust) requires further exploration as an isolated variable and within clinical mental health contexts.
### Appendix A

Table 1: Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Author Positionality</th>
<th>Title and Cost (Physical Copy)</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Q1: Is the book race-affirmative for African-Americans?</th>
<th>Q2: Does the book indirectly/directly address issues of economic distress and cultural mistrust for African Americans?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goggins, David</td>
<td>Black Male, American; Former Navy Seal; Belief in Mind Over Matter</td>
<td>Never Finished (2022); $24.88</td>
<td>Accountability, Resilience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, Directly (cultural mistrust) and Indirectly (economic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear, James</td>
<td>White Male, American; Writer and Entrepreneur; Writes about habits based on personal experience and scientific research</td>
<td>Atomic Habits (2018); $13.49</td>
<td>Being Process Oriented, Awareness</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, Indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama, Michelle</td>
<td>Black Woman, American; Socio-Political Activist</td>
<td>The Light We Carry (2022); $18.48</td>
<td>Authenticity, Making Room For Others</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, Directly (cultural mistrust) and Indirectly (economic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Name</td>
<td>First Name</td>
<td>Race/Nationality</td>
<td>Book Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Greene</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>White Male, American;</td>
<td>The 48 Laws of Power</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>$13.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackesy</td>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>White Male, British;</td>
<td>The Boy, The Mole, The Fox, and The Horse</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>$20.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manson</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>White Male, American;</td>
<td>The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$16.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>White Male, British;</td>
<td>As A Man Thinketh</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>$5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strelecky</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>White Male, American;</td>
<td>The Café On The Edge of The World</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>$7.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyer</td>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Unclear Race/Nationality</td>
<td>The Highly Sensitive</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>$18.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Book Title</td>
<td>Price</td>
<td>Categorization</td>
<td>Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Blavatsky, H.P.</td>
<td>White Female; Russian; Mystic; Founder and Writer of Theosophy (synthesis of religion, philosophy, and science)</td>
<td>The Land Of The Gods (2022) re-print; $12.21</td>
<td></td>
<td>An Invisible Reality,</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dominating Our Animal Instincts</td>
<td>Yes, Indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel, Andrew</td>
<td>White Male; American; Holistic Health Practitioner; Founder of Cinesomatics (feeling-based therapy)</td>
<td>Awaken To Your True Self (2022); $21.99</td>
<td></td>
<td>Accountability, Avoiding Reality</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, Indirectly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyer, Judy</td>
<td>Unclear Race/Nationality (Presumably White Female); Writes about navigating life as an Empath</td>
<td>The Empowered Empath (2019); $18.41</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coping With Emotions, Becoming Assertive</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, Indirectly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Table 2: Definitions for Key Methodological Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>A book theme 1) did not explicitly address African American readers, 2) BUT provided advice applicable to cultural mistrust and/or cost/economic strain</td>
<td>Allen’s As A Man Thinketh (1902), Theme “Power of Mind”: Did not explicitly cater to African American Readers, but contained applicable advice (Think poverty, perpetuate poverty; Think negative interracial interactions, perpetuate negative interracial interactions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>A book theme 1) explicitly addressed African American readers, 2) AND provide advice</td>
<td>Goggin’s Never Finished (2022), Theme “Accountability”: Explicitly catered to African American Readers (growing up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicable</td>
<td>Applicable to cultural mistrust and/or cost/economic strain around racists, i.e. Ku Klux Klan, and contained applicable advice (you can only control yourself...).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrelevant</td>
<td>A book theme neither addressed African American readers, NOR provided advice applicable to cultural mistrust and/or cost/economic strain. Potential Example: A book theme with a non-specific reader in mind (by gender, race, etc.) which promotes isolating from the world.</td>
<td>N/A for Sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race-Affirmative</td>
<td>In total, a book provided advice for an African American individual to positively embrace their racial identity. Potential Example: Obama’s The Light We Carry (2022), Theme “Authenticity”: Explicitly catered to African American Readers (being black is a good thing…share your identity without shame)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Race-Affirmative</td>
<td>Does not refer to a book being discriminatory (belittling African American individuals; reinforcing stereotypes). Rather, in total, a book provided advice for virtually any reader. Valid Example: Greene’s The 48 Laws of Power (1998), Theme “Maintain Privacy”: Does not explicitly cater to African American Readers (…avoid being taken advantage of by not sharing your goals/prospects)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to gain from and was not specific to African American readers
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https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/personal-development-market


