

## For Colored Girls Curriculum Guide for Practicum

**Linda J. M. Holloway\***

*Associate Professor, Program Coordinator of Counseling Education Programs, Department of Instructional Support Programs, Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama, USA*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Linda J. M. Holloway, Associate Professor, Program Coordinator of Counseling Education Programs, Department of Instructional Support Programs, Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

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In our counseling program, the practicum class is the first course where students have their initial encounter with actual clients. The previous pre-clinical courses have been tailored to the students role playing their counseling skills with pseudo clients. Practicum is the beginning course for students to begin enhancing their clinical skills in a clinical setting working one on one with direct clients. Students are assigned to an approved site by the Director of Clinical Training to complete at least a 100 hours at their specified location. They are required to keep a weekly log of their on-site performance, which is documented by their practicum supervisor. Each of the sites are different (i.e. private practice, community mental health, etc.) so the students can get a wide spectrum of experiences. They are required to meet weekly with their on-campus supervisor. There are many formats as to how this class can be structured, but the overall purpose of the course is to ensure students are being exposed to the field of counseling with the proper supervision.

Due to the fact that many students might get limited opportunities with writing treatment plans and preparing case notes, the course is structured to allow students to gain the necessary skills to enhance their professional development. As a professor, I am a strong advocate of teaching through the use of movies. I use the movie *For Colored Girls* to give my students the opportunity to write treatment plans and case notes on the characters in the movies.

I teach at a historically black college where the majority of our students are of the African-American heritage and a large percentage of the students in the counseling program are females. So, selecting this movie allows them to identify with the many challenges black women encounter on a daily basis.

Many of our students are located at practicum sites where their clients reflect the images portrayed within this movie. Additionally, no matter what counseling course I am instructing, I am intentional about ensuring that my students get their dose of culturally relevant information as specified by the Cultural Competence Standards of Counselor Association Counseling Related Programs (CACREP).

*For Colored Girls* is a movie that was adapted from the original works of Ntozake Shange's 1975 Choreopoem- *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide /When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. The movie portrays the lives of ten women whose circumstances are interwoven as they are trying desperately to cope with the complexities of their lives. In my mind, this is the perfect movie to teach my students regarding the various challenges that black women encounter.

What I have discovered about utilizing movies in my classroom is that it creates a safe place for my students to openly discuss mental health issues they might find challenging otherwise to give a voice to. All too often, mental health issues in the black community are not addressed. There is an overwhelming stigma attached to mental illness. This movie, by far, opens your eyes to those issues loudly.

The questions that are developed to support this movie is to allow students to move beyond the surface of speaking about mental health in the black community. It allows them to see firsthand the toll it has on a person's daily life. As heart wrenching as this movie is to watch, the students are very excited to watch it through the eyes of a therapist.

The students are divided into two groups and assigned critical debriefing questions per group. I specifically work to ensure the questions require my students to think critically in the role of a therapist, because this is a movie that entails deeply entrenched psychological issues. I spend hours before the movie and after watching the movie to ensure my students can handle watching the movie.

There are times when I have had students express to me they will not be able to watch a movie because of their own issues or someone close to them. I spend time in individual meeting(s) to assist the students with processing their concerns and emotions. After two or three individual meetings, when I am ensured they are ready to watch the movie, the student can then proceed ahead with the assignment.

Since this is a group project, most students feel supported that they are able to move successfully through the assignment without experiencing any secondary trauma. I share this because should you decide to use this movie as a teaching tool in your practicum class, it is necessary that you caution your students about what they are viewing. The majority of the time, many of my students have already viewed the movie I am assigning them to watch. However, they have not watched it through the lens of a therapist.

The groups are assigned a date to present their presentation to the entire class. They can choose to present the answers to their questions in either a PowerPoint or Prezi presentation. Since some of the questions are in-depth and will require the students to gather information beyond the movie, be sure you allocate adequate time for each group to present. It is a good idea to encourage your students to read over all the questions because perhaps they can combine some of the questions. I expressed to my students that they do not have to answer each question independently, which can greatly reduce their allotted presentation time.

Overall, students have expressed that even though the assignment took some time to complete, they really enjoyed the movie and thought it was a nice added addition to what they learned at their sites.

Any time you assign a movie for students to watch, you want to make sure you follow up with discussion questions. I label my questions- Critical Debriefing Questions. Being able to think critically is a skill students need in order to successfully navigate through graduate school and the terrains of life.

Here is a copy of my curriculum guideline. I hope you find this guide helpful.

**Note:** Please be advised I do not share copyrights of the pictures used in the curriculum. They are for training purposes only.

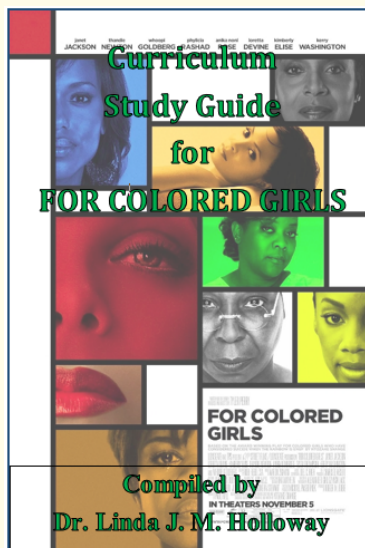


Figure 1

**For colored girls**

**Critical debriefing questions**



**Figure 2**

In 1974, Ntozake Shange’s Choreopoem produced the stage performance “*For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf*” It entails a black woman’s experiences on stage with poetry, dance and music making the audience laugh, cry, angry, and sad at the same time. In two years, the play was a Broadway sensation and won the Obie and Tony Award. The play was eventually produced in various theaters through the country. Tyler Perry, a filmmaker, produced Shange’s stage play into a movie entitled “*For Colored Girls*”. This a movie allows any woman of color in today’s society relate to the issues at hand.

*For Colored Girls* is a story of nine different women - Jo, Tangie, Crystal, Gilda, Kelly, Juanita, Yasmine, Nyla and Alice. They are operating in a world that appear to be mutually exclusive, but yet in many ways, they are all so connected. Some of them know each other and yet few of them are complete strangers. Thus, the crises, heartbreak, crimes, and life circumstances find a way to ultimately bring these women together. Each woman has her own story, scares, and successes buried within. Yet, through it all, they find a way to lift each other’s burdens and beautifully wear their colors. They come to understand they are all divinely created to be their sister’s keeper.

**The *For Color Girls* Cast:**

1. Kimberly Elise = Crystal/Brown
2. Janet Jackson = Jo/Red
3. Loretta Devine = Juanita/Green
4. Thandie Newton = Tangie/Orange
5. Anika Noni Rose = Yasmine/Yellow
6. Kerry Washington = Kelly/Blue
7. Tessa Thompson = Nyla/Purple
8. Phylicia Rashad = Gilda
9. Whoopi Goldberg = Alice/White



Figure 3

### Critical debriefing questions

#### Group-1

1. Please select three critical scenes from the movie and explain in detail why they had the most impact on you.
2. Make a list of all the social issues each of the women was dealing with. Explain how these issues still impact women lives today.
3. Provide a list of social agencies with contact information both locally and nationally that can assist with these social issues.
4. Which women had the most impact on you and why?
5. Which women went through the most transformations as a result of her situation?
6. What exactly do you think the colors the women wore represented?
7. Pick at list three women in the film. Compare and contrast their lives in terms of similarities and differences.
8. Review at least three research articles that talk about colors and psychological health and report their findings.
9. What were some of your favorite quotes in the movie and explain why?
10. What are the current statistics of women being abused in America?
  - a. List some of the common reasons after reporting an incident these women continue to stay in these relationships.
  - b. What are some of the early warning signs that a woman can detect to determine whether or not she is in an abusive relationship?
  - c. Once a women has determined her current relationship is abusive, what actions would you recommend she take for the safety of both her and the children when exiting this type of relationship?
  - d. Provide the class with at least three high profile cases you are aware of a woman being abused.
  - e. If a woman chooses to stay, how would you handle this as her therapist?
  - f. What month is 'Battered Women' month? What month is "National Violence Against Women month?"
11. How often are women raped in America? What is the current statistics on college campuses?
  - a. What is the appropriate protocol a woman should take once she is raped?
  - b. Is it the woman's fault they get raped? How does society often view women who are raped? Why?

- c. What is “Date Rape?”
  - d. What type of counseling is available for women who have been raped?
12. How are black women viewed when they are raped?
  13. List some common myths as it relate to rape.
  14. How does the women’s stories in the movie still compare to the plight of women in today’s society regardless of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
  15. What role/or how can forgiveness have an impact on these women’s lives in their healing process?
  16. Please review the following women’s lives and provide a brief overview in a case study format. This overview should entail what is actually happening in their lives, along with a treatment plan as to how you would as a therapist provide support to these women.
  17. There were several poems recited by the women to illustrate the pain and struggle they were experiencing. Listed below are two. Please review and tell what message the women were betraying? How can poetry in therapy be utilized? How effective is it? Please give examples.



Figure 4



Figure 5





<p><b>Jo - Ignoring the Signs</b></p> <p>Warning- do not ignore the signs of a Down Low Man under no circumstances.</p> 	 <p><b>Tangie – Promiscuous</b></p> <p>We all got a story. Do not judge me. I am working through mine the best way I know how.</p>
<p><b>Juanita – Forgiving</b></p> <p>Forgiveness is an art but being a fool for a man is unacceptable.</p>	 <p><b>Yasmine - Trusting</b></p> <p>It is okay to trust but just know everybody does not deserve your trust.</p>
 <p><b>Crystal – the Victim</b></p> <p>Abuse is nonnegotiable! <u>So</u> what, he is the father of your two children.</p>	

Figure 6



Figure 7

### For Colored Girls – Poems

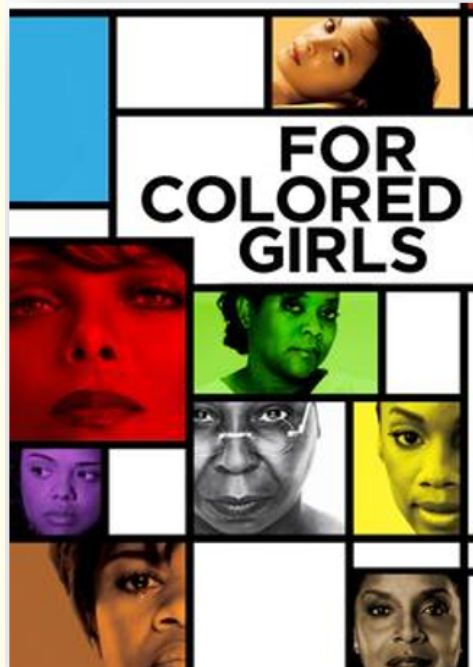
Ever since I realized there was someone call  
A colored girl an evil woman a bitch or a nag  
I been trying not to be that and leave bitterness  
In somebody else's cup/come to somebody to love me  
Without deep and nasty smelling scald from lye or being  
Left screaming in a street full a lunatics/whispering  
Slut bitch niggah/get out ta here with all that/  
I didn't have any of that for you/I brought you what joy  
I found and I found joy/honest fingers round my face/with  
Dead musicians on 78's from cuba/or live musicians of five  
Dollar lp's from Chicago/ where I have never been/and I love  
Willie colon and arsenio rodriquez/especially because I can make  
The music loud enuf/ so there is no me but dance/and when  
I can dance like that/ there's nothing cd hurt me/but  
I get tired and i have to come off the floor and then there's  
That woman who hurt you/ who you left/ three of four times/  
and just went back/ after you put my heart in the bottom of  
Yr shoe/you just walked back to where you hurt/and I didn't  
Have nothing/so I went to where somebody had something for me/  
But he want you/and I was on the way back from her house  
In the bottom of yr shoe/so this is not a love poem/because there  
Are only memorial albums available/and even charlie mingus  
Wanted desperately to be a pimp/and I won't be able to see eddie  
Palmieri for months/so this is a requiem for myself/because i  
Have died in a real way/not with aqua coffins and du-wop cadillacs/  
I used to joke about when I was messing round/ but a real dead  
Lovin is here for you now/because I don't know anymore/ how  
To avoid my own face wet with tears/because i had convinced  
Myself colored girls had no right to sorrow/and I lived  
and loved that way and kept sorrow on the curb/ allegedly  
For you/ but I know I did it for myself/  
I can't stand it  
I can't stand being sorry and colored

### A Rapist

Rapist doesn't have to be a stranger to be legitimate.  
Someone you never saw.  
But, if you've been in public with him, danced one dance,  
kissed him good-bye lightly with closed mouth.  
Pressing charges will be hard, as hard as trying to keep your legs closed while

five fools try to run a train on you.  
These men friends of ours who smile nice stay employed and take us out to dinner.  
Lock the door behind you.  
And we are left with the scars being betrayed by men who know us.  
And expect like the stranger we always thought was coming that we will submit.  
We must have known.  
Women relinquish all personal rights in the presence of a man  
who apparently could be considered a rapist  
especially if he has been considered a friend.  
And is no less worthy of being beat within an inch of his life.  
Being publicly ridiculed having two fists shoved up his ass.  
Then the stranger we always thought it would be who never showed up.  
Because it turns out the nature of rape has changed.  
We can now meet them in circles we frequent for companionship.  
See them at the coffeehouse with someone else we know.  
We could even have them over for dinner.  
And get raped in our own houses by invitation.

**Group-2**



*Figure 8*



1. Give a brief biographical sketch of Ntozake Shange and what was it about her life that empowered her to write "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is ENUF?"
2. What were the turning points in the women's lives to realize they needed to take make a change? Please list the character(s) along with the event when providing your answers.
3. For Colored Girls deals with issues such as rape, abortion, infidelity, HIV, and abuse. It also deals with love. How does love play a role in each of the above issues? This could entail being in love or the desire to be loved.
4. In the movie, Nyla is the young lady who is a high school dancer who loses her virginity and finds herself faced with an unwanted pregnancy. Nyla undergoes an unsanitary, back ally abortion at the hands of deeply disturbed women.
  - A. What did Nyla tell both her mother and sister she needed the \$300 dollars for?
  - B. How did her sister find out otherwise? What do you actually think keeps her sister Tangie from giving her the money?
  - C. Many young ladies, even in today's society, are faced with unwanted teen pregnancy and make the decision to have an abortion. Thus, if you are a therapist and a young lady comes to visit your office torn about what she should do, how would you handle this situation? Do you have any legal obligations to the child's parent, why or why not?
  - D. What are the current statistics for teenage pregnancies? What programs do we have in place to assist these young ladies?
  - E. What challenges, if any, do women face post abortion?
  - F. Do you recommend women who are having an abortion to seek professional counseling, why or why not?
  - G. Nyla actually does two poems surrounding her situation, "Graduation Night" and "Eyes Crawling up on Me, Eyes Crawling Up My Thigh." What actually was she expressing in both of these monologues?

Was graduation nite and I was the only virgin in the crowd

Bobby mills martin Jerome and Sammy Yates eddie jones and randi

All cousins

All the prettiest niggers in this factory town

Carried me out with me

In a deep black buick

Smelling of thunderbird and ladies in heat

We rambled from Camden to mount holly

Laughing at the afternoon's speeches

And dangling our tassels from the rear view mirrtor

Climbing different sorta project staors

Moving toward snapping beer cans and

Get it get it that's the way to do it mama

All mercer county graduated the same nite

Cosmetology secretarial pre-college autoshop and business

All us moving from mama to whatever was out there

5. Alice, the lady in white, is the demonic mother of Nyla and Tangi. What was her childhood like and what impact, if any, do you think it had on her rearing her two daughters? Explain.
  - A. What role does religion play in the lives of African-American women? How can a therapist incorporate this aspect of their lives into professional counseling?

- B. How do you think Alice has allowed her zeal for religion to impact her relationship with her children? What type of therapy would you recommend for her and why?
6. After Crystal's children are killed, she sinks into a deep depression. Gilda comes into her apartment one night and tells her that in order to move forward with her life, she needs to take some responsibility for the death of her children. What do you believe Gilda meant by Crystal accepting responsibility? Could this sentiment be applied to any of the other women in the film? Explain.
  7. Men were not always represented in the best light throughout the film. What do you believe the intent was in developing the male characters as represented in *For Colored Girls*?
  8. A wide range of circumstances and relationships are examined in the film. Was there a character or situation with which you most identified? Why?
  9. How did each of the nine female characters in the film embrace a facade of strength and courage of being a woman?
  10. *For Colored Girls* ends with many of the main characters not only embracing the strength of being a woman, but also embracing the bonds they have formed with one another. What circumstances in their lives allowed this to occur? How do you think this impacted the rest of their lives?
  11. You have been contacted by the "National Women Care Services Provider" to provide a group plan to assist these women in their healing process. Please describe your plan and what group activities you would utilize in this process.
  12. Toward the end of the movie, all the women come together and Juanita begins to use sentence completions to get the women to open up and talk such as:
    - A. My love is to\_\_\_\_\_.
    - B. Tell me one of your "Oh So Sorry Story"\_\_\_\_\_.

As a therapist, how did you view this and do you think this was therapeutic for the women? If so, how or why not?

13. What role does self-love play in all the women's lives?
14. There were several poems recited by the women to illustrate their pain and struggle they were feeling. Listed below are two. Please review and tell what message the women betraying? How can poetry in therapy be utilized? How effective is it? Please give examples.

**For Color Girls – Poems**

**I Don't Need Any More Apologies**

Janet Jackson brilliantly delivers this poem to her down low husband in the film.

One thing I don't need  
Is any more apologies  
I got sorry greeting me at my front door  
You can keep yrs  
I don't know what to do wit em  
They don't open doors  
Or bring the sun back  
They don't make me happy  
Or get a morning paper  
Didn't nobody stop using my tears to wash cars  
I loved you on purpose  
I was open on purpose

I still crave vulnerability and close talk  
And I'm not even sorry bout you being sorry  
You can carry all the guilt and grime ya wanna  
Just don't give it to me  
I can't use another sorry  
Next time  
You should admit  
You're mean/ low-down/trifling/and no count straight out  
Stead being sorry all the time  
Enjoy being yourself

**My Love Is**

My love is too delicate to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too beautiful to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too sanctified to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too magic to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too Saturday nite to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too complicated to have thrown back on my face.  
My love is too music to have thrown back on my face.

15. Which character(s) did you most identify with and why?
16. If you had the opportunity to give another title to this movie what would be and why?
17. Select one of the issue that the women confronted in this movie and Explain how you would develop campaign to support women in our current society who are still threaten by the same issue.



Figure 9



*Figure 10*



*Figure 11*



*Figure 12*

### Disclosure

This article has not been published elsewhere, nor has it been submitted simultaneously for publication elsewhere. It does not constitute a conflict of interest for the author.

### Recommended Readings

1. Solomon Gary. "Real Therapy: How Movies Inspire You to Overcome Life's Problems". Aslan publishing Fairfield, CT (2001).
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