Crash Diversity Training Curriculum for Counseling

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We live in a very culturally diverse society. The melting pot theory was a concept where it was believed you could place people from diverse ethnic backgrounds together and they would amalgamate into one group of people. Well, this concept has never come to fruition. What happens instead is that people become a salad bowl. Counseling is a discipline where it is believed that in order to reach the masses of people from various backgrounds, it would be incumbent upon the field to learn how to work with people from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Counseling programs who are in the business of training counselors to be effective and efficient counselors have adopted and infused in their curriculum this idea of multicultural competency. I have had both the pleasure and honor to teach a class centered on this phenomenon at various universities, as well as, create and develop it at others. Counseling Diverse Populations is a course, in my opinion, that has to be taught with heart, style, and class. A professor must be willing to allow students to experience cultures up close and personal. I spend a great deal of my time exploring ways to make this a reality in my class.

Several years ago I started a something I called "Project PRIDE." PRIDE represent "People Respecting Individual Differences Everyday". This is a project where I teach and train people to respect the differences of other cultures through learning, experiencing diversity activities, and the use of movies.

I am a connoisseur of movies. I spend a great deal of time thinking of ways to incorporate them into my classes to bring to light concepts the students are exposed to in their textbooks. There are many movies on the market that address the issues of culture, race, racism, and discrimination.

Over the years, Hollywood has done an excellent job of allowing filmmakers to paint these stories on the big screen. As a professor of the Counseling Diverse Populations class for over 20 years, I have taken advantage of these opportunities which have given a plethora of movies to choose from.

One of my all-time favorites is the movie Crash. Crash is a dynamic movie just like the title says where everybody wanders throughout the movie both consciously and unconsciously crashing into each other.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate how I have managed to incorporate this movie into my Counseling Diverse Populations class. Overall, students have expressed they found this activity exciting and a unique way to illustrate what was in the textbook, their lectures, and the articles they had to read for this class.

Students are placed in groups where they are given the instructions to be very creative when they are presenting their presentation. The students work in small groups consisting of 4 to 5 people. They are assigned questions according to their group to answer. They are required to present their overall presentation in the form of PowerPoint or a Prezi presentation.

The students are given a designated day within the semester where they are required to meet on their own during class time to review the movie and answer the questions. I found this to be the best way to maximize the time for my class. I am not a big fan of taking up class time and having the students to watch a 2, 2 ½ or 3 hour movie. It works better for me to assign time within the curriculum to have students complete this assignment. This allows students to watch the movie in the comfort of their homes or some other designated place they find conducive other than the classroom.

It is always a rewarding experience when the groups present their projects to the entire class. I never know how the students will conduct their presentations, whether it will be a role play, a surprised guest speaker, conducting a talk show, release of a best seller book or a game show; it is certainly worth the wait.

As a professor, you really do not want to restrict your students' creativity when they are presenting their presentation. Considering the discussion of topics such as racism, discrimination, stereotypes, sexism, and homophobia, it can be emotionally draining for students. Particularly, when you reside in a culture where incidences of racism are almost daily occurrences. The overall goal when discussing topics of this magnitude is to create a safe environment where everyone's voices can be heard.

Below is the curriculum I use with my students. I hope you find it useful and beneficial.

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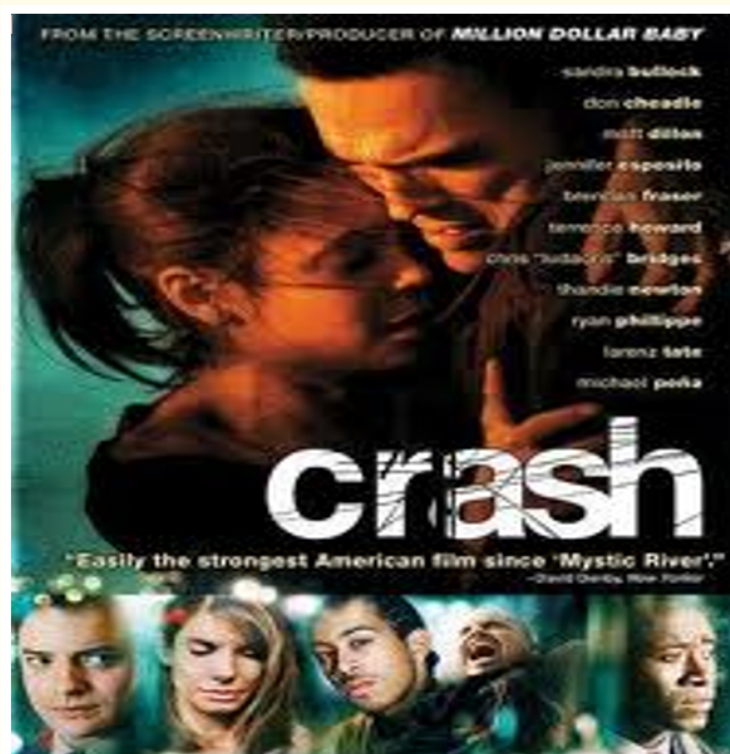

Figure 1

"You think you know who you are. You have no idea".

   The city of Los Angeles is shown as a place where people think and move fast. The cast of characters seem to speed through their lives without always considering the connections and consequences of their actions. This candid film shows how a very diverse group of individuals "crash" into one another and leave painful marks behind. Watch and see just how much of what one feels, says, and does can impact so many others around them.

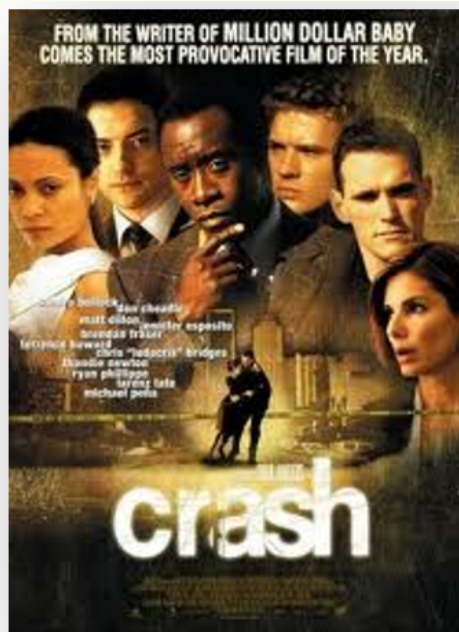Compiled by: Dr. Linda J. M. Holloway, Ed.D, NCC.

Figure 2

Critical debriefing questions: Group 1

1. Define what the word "Crash" symbolizes in this movie? How is "Crash" applicable to you as a multicultural counselor? Please explain in detail.

2. Why do you think Rick, the District Attorney, wanted to cover up the fact that his car was stolen by two black men? Were his ideas for "handling" the situation appropriate? Why or why not?

3. Should Tommy (police officer) have done anything differently to stop Officer John Ryan from treating the Thayer's in the manner he did when he pulled them over? What should he have done?

4. Who is the founder of the "Me Too" movement? Explain the concept behind this movement and how you think it might apply in Ms. Thayer's situation.

5. Define stereotypes. List the various types that stood out to you the most in the movie and why.

6. What are the opinions of Officer John Ryan? Do you think you can get him to change? If so how and if not why not?

7. What do you think happen in Jean's life that made her so angry? What made her realize that her housekeeper, Maria, was her best friend? What might have kept her from seeing this and treating her with respect all along?

8. Can you think of someone like Jean in today's society? Explain how you as a therapist would work with them.

9. Which connection(s) between characters was most interesting? Please share your thoughts.

10. What character(s) did you like the least? Why?

11. What character(s) did you like the most? Why?

12. You have been contacted by the National Diversity Hot Line to provide professional counseling for the district attorney's wife Jean (Sandra Bullock). Please provide a detailed treatment plan along with your theoretical framework.

13. What are some of the major challenges each of the groups represented in the movie currently face in today's society? Explain.

14. Which groups were represented in the movie? Were there other groups omitted? If so, list some of them. What are some of their challenges they face in today's society and why? Explain.

15. Define the following terms:

    a. Overt Racism

    b. Covert Racism

    c. Institutional Racism

16. Give examples of each from the movie.

17. There is snow in the beginning of the movie and at the end there is burning. What do you think this symbolizes? What happen to objects when they are burned?

18. Imagine the characters of Crash are stranded on an island. The rescue plane can only make one trip to save three characters. Which characters would you choose? Why?

Figure 3

Figure 4

Anthony, played by Chris "Ludacris" Bridges

- Peter, played by Larenz Tate

- Christine, played by Thandie Newton

- Cameron, played by Terrance Howard

- Officer Ryan, played by Matt Dillon

- Officer Hanson, played by Ryan Phillippe

- Farhad, played by Shaun Toub

- Dorri, played by Bahar Soomekh

- Ria, played by Jennifer Esposito

- Daniel, played by Michael Peña

- Graham, played by Don Cheadle

- Rick, played by Brendan Fraser

- Jean, played by Sandra Bullock.

Determine the criteria for boarding the plane. You may want to examine the characters' background and past. Morals, ethics, and values are also possibilities.

In a detailed argumentative essay, explain your three choices for rescue. Be sure to include specific examples from the movie. In conclusion, those that could not be rescued, what could they have done differently to improve their odds of being rescued?
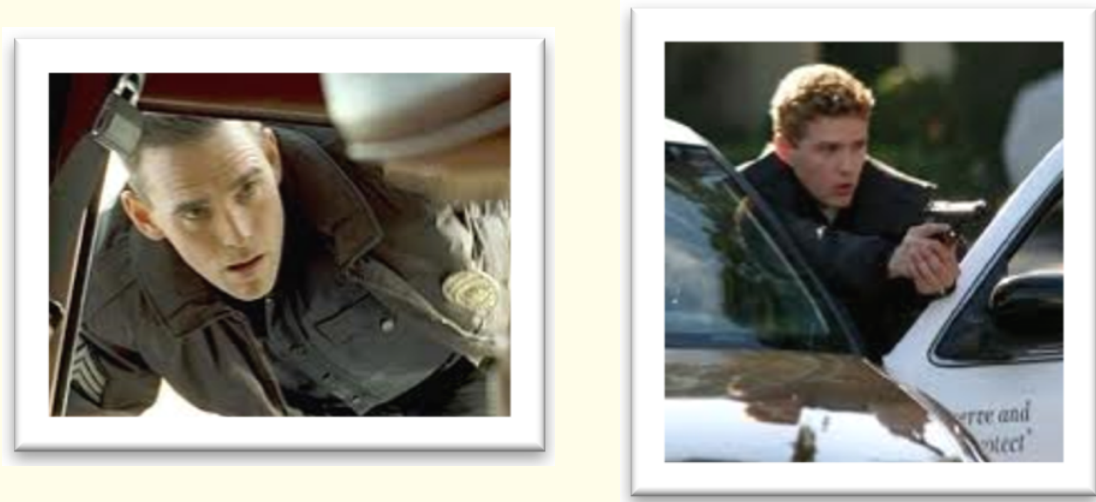

Figure 5

Critical debriefing questions: Group 2

1. Think about the opening line in the movie: "It's the sense of touch. In any real city, you walk, you know. You brush past people, people bump into you. In L.A., nobody touches you. We're always behind this metal and glass. I think we miss that touch so much, that we crash into each other just so we can feel something." Explain in your own words what you think this mean. Define in your own words your meaning of crash. How are people actually crashes into others in the movie? Give examples or ways we still do that in today's society.

2. What three critical events stood out to you the most in the movie and why?

3. Where do you think Officer John Ryan's feelings about Black people came from?

4. Pick a theme you see repeated throughout the film and explore it. An example: The police detective, the television director, and the young policeman are all asked to do things by their superiors at work that go against their moral and personal values. Explore their dilemmas, the choices they make, and the effects of those choices.

5. Reflect on the statement that television producer Cameron Thayer made to Anthony: "You embarrass me, you embarrass yourself." What do you think were Thayer's motives?

6. What do you think pushed Officer John Ryan to risk his own life to save Mrs. Thayer?

7. What were the benefits to detective Graham Waters taking the DA's offer to lie in exchange for cleaning up his brother's police record? What were the consequences of his decision?

8. What exactly is high and low context paralanguage? Give examples in the movie. Also, provide examples of communication barriers.

9. What connection(s) between characters was most interesting? Please share your thoughts.

10. What three (3) character(s) did you like the most? Why?

11. What three (3) character(s) did you like the least? Why?

12. You have been contacted by the National Diversity Hot Line to provide professional counseling for Officer John Ryan (Matt Dillon). Please provide a detailed treatment plan alone with your theoretical framework.

13. You have been assigned as a multicultural therapist to work with Anthony. What do you see as his major issues? Please develop a workable treatment plan.

14. How would you describe the role of Cameron? What stage of racial identity do you think he is in? Explain. What type of help would you give him as his therapist?

15. Imagine the characters of Crash are stranded on an island. The rescue plane can only make one trip to save three characters. Which characters would you choose? Why?

Figure 6

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Figure 7

Figure 8

Critical debriefing questions: Group 3

1. Define what the word "Crash" symbolizes in this movie? How is "Crash" applicable to you as a multicultural counselor? Please explain in detail.

2. Who was responsible for the death of Graham Waters' brother? Officer Hansen (Tommy)? Graham? His mother? Himself? Please discuss your reasons.

3. Is there a character in this film with whom it is impossible for us to sympathize? Who? Why? Use specific examples from the film and keep in mind each character as you create your argument.

4. When the Thayer's were pulled over by Officer John Ryan, Mr. Thayer chose to apologize to avoid being arrested? What were the consequences? Do you think he made the right decision? Why or why not?

5. Which character was the most unethical? Why?

6. What is affirmative action? Do you think we need it why or why not? Explain.

7. Describe what Officer Ryan's relationship was like with his father? How do you think this impacted his current attitude? Explain.

8. Explain Officer Ryan's attitude when he went to seek help for his father.

9. You have been contacted by the National Diversity Hot Line to provide professional counseling for detective Graham (Don Cheadle). Please provide a detailed treatment plan alone with your theoretical framework.

10. You have been contacted by the National Diversity Hot line to provide professional counseling for store owner Farhad (Shaun Toub)). Please provide a detailed treatment plan alone with your theoretical framework.

    (Figure 9)

11. You have been asked by the local city schools to show the movie Crash and develop a diversity workshop concerning several issues that are addressed in the movie. Please provide a detail plan of your workshop.

12. Pick three scenes from this movie that impacted you the most and why.

13. Peter has contacted you for help as the number one sought after multicultural therapist in the nation. How would you provide him support? Please provide a treatment plan to support your answer.

14. Officer Hanson has stumbled into your office desperately seeking help. What services would you provide? Please provide a treatment plan to support your answer.

15. At the end of the film, we are presented with several shots that cut from character to character. Each character in these shots is gazing into the night from the glass behind. Explain what you think that might represent.

16. Take a look in today's society and pick examples of how we will still crash among each other. Explain what and how you think we work to improve this situation.

17. Imagine the characters of Crash are stranded on an island. The rescue plane can only make one trip to save three characters. Which characters would you choose? Why?

Figure 9

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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

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