

Speaking Truth to Power: How Black/African Psychology Changed the Discipline of Psychology

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Abstract

Black/African psychology is a distinct disciplinary field of psychology that includes a community of scholars and a history of scholarly inquiry. Black psychologists grounded in a Black/African psychology tradition have long challenged the hegemonic paradigms and racist beliefs perpetuated by Eurocentric approaches to psychology. However, in the absence of teaching about the important contributions of Black/African psychology, many individuals remain unaware of its historical and contemporary impact on the discipline of psychology. Using the three methodological approaches of deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction as a framework, the authors identify the many ways in which Black/African psychology has challenged prevailing beliefs in psychology about Black behavior and culture and forever changed psychological research on Black people.

Keywords

Black psychology, African psychology, deconstruction, reconstruction, construction

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As the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) celebrates its 50th anniversary, it is time to reflect on the field of Black/African psychology, specifically the impact of Black/African psychological theory and research on the discipline of psychology. Such a discussion is necessary in light of sentiments that question or deny the existence of Black/African psychology as a distinct academic disciplinary field within psychology (Smith, 1973). The discipline of psychology is defined as the scientific study of behavior and the mind. In their quest to have their discipline viewed as a science, and specifically as a STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) discipline, psychologists emphasize the use of the scientific method as a means to collect, analyze, and interpret empirical data that are used to generate knowledge. Since 1892, the American Psychological Association (APA) has advanced the discipline of psychology and the interests of psychologists. However, in 1968, a group of over 200 Black psychologists met at the APA convention in San Francisco, California, and accused the APA of condoning the White racist character of American society (Williams, 2008). Challenging the hegemony of the APA and the lack of Black representation in psychology, the concerns expressed by these Black psychologists focused initially on utilitarian issues, including the following:

1. Increasing the number of Black students and professionals in psychology
2. Increasing the representation of Black psychologists in the organizational structure of the APA
3. Improving the training and certification of psychologists who work with minority groups

The ABPsi was especially critical of the APA's failure to adequately address the effects of White racism on the Black community. Identification of these issues was followed by a 10-point program, authored by ABPsi president Robert Williams and sent to 300 psychology departments (Williams, 2008). This 10-point program was again utilitarian in nature, focusing on increasing the numbers of Black graduate students while institutionalizing various forms of support for them. This utilitarian thrust of the ABPsi was a necessary focus at that point in its organizational development. However, the ABPsi quickly realized that an independent Black psychological association needed to challenge the assumptions of a Eurocentric psychology in order to provide the type of help and expertise that ultimately was needed to heal and liberate the Black community.

Trained by White psychologists using a Eurocentric and a racially biased curriculum, Black psychologists were constantly exposed to messages of

Black deficiency, pathology, and inferiority. This was the context underlying Joseph White's (1970b) seminal article "Toward a Black Psychology." Published in 1970 during the tumultuous sociopolitical struggle for Black freedom, "Toward a Black Psychology" was the first article to articulate an authentic, non-deficit-based psychology for Black people. The article laid the foundation for other Black psychologists to challenge the hegemony of traditional Eurocentric psychology. Later in 1970, a young Black psychologist named Wade Nobles "introduced the notion of African philosophy and African psychology to Black psychologists" (Williams, 2008, p. 254). This moment proved to be seminal in the organizational development and philosophical orientation of the ABPsi. President Williams (2008) had already warned ABPsi members to "break the quasi-dependency and symbiotic relationship with APA" (p. 254). Williams's warning led to the ABPsi holding its annual conference at different times and locations than the APA. However, more important than breaking the quasi-dependency on and symbiotic relationship with the APA was breaking the dependency on Eurocentric psychology.

These early contributions by White, Nobles, and other Black psychologists laid the foundation for the creation of Black/African psychology as a distinct disciplinary field within psychology.¹ There are debates about what criteria constitute a disciplinary field (Beyer & Lodahl, 1976). The criteria under consideration typically include the following:

1. Presence of a community of scholars
2. A tradition or history of inquiry
3. A mode of inquiry that defines how data are collected and interpreted, as well as the requirements for what constitutes new knowledge
4. Existence of a communications network

By any of these criteria Black/African psychology can rightfully be considered a distinct disciplinary field. There is an identifiable community of scholars, many of whom are members of the ABPsi. There is a tradition or history of inquiry, dating back to the 1970s with the creation of the *Journal of Black Psychology* in 1974 and publications by authors such as Joseph White (1970a, 1970b), William Cross (1971), Charles Thomas (1971), Wade Nobles (1972), Na'im Akbar (1974), Cedric Clark (1975), and Wade Boykin (1977), among others, all the way to the present. As a field within psychology, Black/African psychology utilizes a mode of inquiry that is consistent with the predominant methodology used in psychology. This mode of inquiry includes systematic observation, measurement, and experiment and involves the formulating and testing of hypotheses. However, African psychology also

believes that the nature of knowledge construction is not limited to the material, or that which is observable. African psychology values self-knowledge and intuition as equally important sources of knowledge, and it defines the nature of reality and understands human behavior in distinctly different ways from those of traditional European/Eurocentric psychology (Grills, 2002).

Finally, there exists within Black/African psychology an extensive communications network, which includes the publication of a quarterly newsletter, *Psych Discourse*, as well as an email listserv, abpsi@abpsi.org. There should be no question that Black/African psychology is a distinct disciplinary field within psychology.

In this article, we examine the impact of Black/African psychological theory and research on the discipline of psychology. It should be noted that we make a distinction between prominent Black psychologists (and in some cases psychiatrists) who have made significant contributions to psychology that are not ostensibly connected to a Black/African psychology tradition—for example, Kenneth & Mamie Clark's (1939) doll studies,² Chester Pierce's microaggression concept (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978), and Claude Steele's stereotype threat research (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995)—and prominent Black psychologists who have made significant contributions to psychology and are connected to a Black/African psychology tradition. We operationalize connection to a Black/African psychology tradition as entailing one or more of the following: (a) work by Black psychologists connected to the self-determinative belief in an authentic Black/African psychology, (b) work by Black psychologists actively involved in the ABPsi, (c) work by Black psychologists published in the *Journal of Black Psychology*, and/or (d) work by Black psychologists published in a Black outlet (e.g., *Black World*, *The Black Scholar*). This article focuses on contributions by Black psychologists that fall in these groups. We first define what is meant by African/Black psychology. Next, we review the major schools of thought and methodological approaches of Black/African psychology, followed by specific examples from the methodological approaches of Black/African psychology that have impacted the discipline of psychology. We conclude by discussing Black psychology as a precursor to the positive psychology movement, and its impact on multicultural psychology.

Black/African Psychology

Over the years, there has been disagreement among Black psychologists over the definition of Black/African psychology (Baldwin, 1991). Joseph White (1970a), referred to as the father of Black psychology, describes Black psychology as understanding the lifestyles of Black people based on their authentic experiences in this country. Along those lines, Faye Belgrave and Kevin

Allison (2010) describe African American psychology as the psychology of people of African descent that views Black people from the perspective of their own distinct standards. These definitions contrast with the more African-centered definitions that are based in African philosophy. Wade Nobles (1980) described African/Black psychology as “rooted in the nature of black culture which is based on particular indigenous (originally indigenous to African) philosophical assumptions” (p. 31). Similarly, Cheryl Grills (2002) describes African-centered psychology as being concerned with “defining African psychological experiences from an African perspective that reflects an African orientation to the meaning of life, the world, and relationships with others and one’s self” (p. 13). Based on discussions held at the African Psychology Institute, the Board of Directors of the ABPsi submitted the following definition of Black/African psychology:

Black/African-centered psychology is a dynamic manifestation of unifying African principles, values and traditions. It is the self-conscious “centering” of psychological analyses and applications in African realities, cultures, and epistemologies. Black/African-centered psychology, as a system of thought and action, examines the processes that allow for the illumination and liberation of the Spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence, Black/African-centered psychology recognizes: the Spirit that permeates everything that is; the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected; the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence; and the idea that communal self knowledge is the key to mental health. (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 1999, p. 95)

This definition links Black psychology with African psychology synonymously to indicate their indivisibility. Accordingly, Black psychology is African psychology, and African psychology is Black psychology. We also note that this definition relies more heavily on an African-centered philosophical perspective than on what might be characterized as a “Black American” perspective. This definition remains a point of contention for some Black and African psychologists (see Ebede-Ndi, 2016, for a detailed critique of African-centered psychology). The ideological differences are perhaps the strongest indicator that Black/African psychology is a robust disciplinary field of inquiry. Additional evidence for Black psychology’s status as a disciplinary field can be found in Black Studies.

Schools of Thought

In Maulana Karenga’s (1991, 1993, 1994, 2010) classic book *Introduction to Black Studies*, Black psychology is listed as one of the seven core areas of

Black Studies. Karenga identifies three schools of thought in Black psychology: traditional, reform, and radical. The traditional school of thought focuses on criticizing White psychology but supports using Eurocentric psychology with minor changes (e.g., eliminating racial bias). While “traditional” is included as a school of thought within Black psychology, in point of fact it does not recognize the existence of a distinct Black psychology. Rather, it describes those Black psychologists who believe that universal understandings of human behavior as articulated by traditional European psychology largely apply to Black people, except for the racial bias. Examples of Black psychologists who embody the traditional school of thought include Kenneth and Mamie Clark, Robert Guthrie, and Claude Steele. The reform school of thought typically attacks racism in White psychology and identifies the limitations of White psychology while recognizing the existence of a distinct Black psychology. While critical of White psychology, the reform school of thought nevertheless believes that there are still some aspects of White psychology that are useful and can be merged with Black psychology. Examples of Black psychologists who embody the reform school of thought include Joseph White, James Jackson, Curtis Banks, Margaret Beale Spencer, and Faye Belgrave. The radical school of thought adopts an African-centered conceptual framework for Black psychology by emphasizing African culture and philosophy.³ A defining characteristic of the radical school is that it does not seek to appeal to White people but, rather, focuses more on transforming Blacks’ attitudes toward themselves. Examples of Black psychologists who embody the radical school of thought include Asa Hilliard, Wade Nobles, Na’im Akbar, Kobi Kambon, Linda James Myers, and Cheryl Grills.

Methodological Approaches

Along with the three schools of thought are three methodological approaches that have characterized the work of Black psychologists who have been committed to addressing the limitations of White/Eurocentric psychology. First identified by Curtis Banks (1982), the methodological approaches are deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction. Deconstruction criticizes and identifies the errors and weaknesses in traditional White psychology. This approach critiques the deficit and racist narratives promulgated by Eurocentric psychological theories. Reconstruction focuses on correcting the errors and/or falsifications about Black attitudes and behavior. The purpose of this approach is to reconstruct traditional Eurocentric understandings of human behavior into culturally sensitive psychological models of Blacks. Construction focuses on creating new psychological paradigms for understanding the Black experience through theory construction. This approach

views traditional Eurocentric psychology as offering little to nothing that can be applied to the lives and experiences of Black/African people.

Deconstruction

White preference in Blacks. Following ABPsi's organizational departure from the APA, the work of several Black scholars signified an ideological departure from traditional Eurocentric psychology. These scholars realized that in order to advance an authentic, non-deficit-based psychology for Black people, a critical examination and rejection of the status quo was necessary. Former *Journal of Black Psychology* editor-in-chief Curtis Banks was one of the most influential Black psychologists who used deconstruction methods. Banks was an intellectual gadfly who identified some of the most pervasive and damaging Eurocentric psychological deficit-based themes about Blacks. He brilliantly and systematically dismantled these themes by exposing the methodological flaws in the empirical literature. The first deficit-based theme he identified was the so-called phenomenon of White preference among Blacks (Banks, 1976).

For years, the psychological literature had focused on the behavior and self-concept of Blacks. The so-called phenomenon of White preference in Blacks had been promulgated in the psychological literature based on a methodology of choosing opposite-race dolls, puppets, and other representations. Psychologists interpreted Blacks' choosing White representations as racial self-rejection. Several Black psychologists, including James Jones, Wade Nobles, and later Joseph Baldwin, pointed out the methodological limitations of this literature. However, Banks (1976) argued that there was something more fundamentally problematic about this literature beyond methodological limitations. He argued that the body of research used to assert the existence of White preference in Blacks did not convincingly demonstrate that the phenomenon existed. Using quantitative criteria, Banks argued that a White preference in Blacks would need to be demonstrated statistically by Blacks choosing White representations more than what would be expected by chance. However, after assigning 33 studies of Blacks' choice behavior to (a) White preference, (b) Black preference, or (c) nonpreference, Banks found that 69% of the studies found nonpreference, 25% found Black preference, while only 6% found White preference in Blacks. These equivocal results underscored Banks's contention that there was no pervasive phenomenon of White preference in Blacks. Banks's critique of the White preference in Blacks literature is a classic piece of deconstructive scholarship and among the first of several seminal publications by Black psychologists that systematically chipped away at long-standing deficit-oriented notions about the behavior, motivations, and self-concept of Black people.

Self-hatred. Continuing the foundational deconstructive work in Black psychology was another influential scholar, Joseph Baldwin. In his article titled "Theory and Research Concerning the Notion of Black Self-Hatred: A Review and Reinterpretation," Baldwin (1979) put forth an extensive and incisive analysis of the abundant accumulation of Western theories and research centered around the notion of "Black self-hatred." Grown out of European American self-concept theories (Cooley, 1972; Mead, 1934), this body of literature contended that the Black self-concept largely depends on interactions, particularly racist interactions, between Blacks and Whites (e.g., Bevis, 1921; Davis & Dollard, 1940; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Myrdal, 1944; Pettigrew, 1964). To bolster this claim, proponents of this construct indiscriminately utilized Cooley's (1972) social looking-glass theory as a framework, which proposes that one's self-conception is primarily determined by the way in which it reflects through the eyes of "significant others," such as close family members, peers, and immediate community members. Black self-hatred scholars deemed this theory applicable to the often distant and racist interactions between Blacks and Whites. These scholars argued that the racist attitudes of the larger White community represent a social looking-glass, resulting in poor self-regard among Blacks. According to Baldwin (1979), these scholars intellectually relegated people of African descent to being passive reactors rather than actors. In so doing, these scholars converged on the basic assumption that people of African descent suffer "pathological effects" in self-concept from the psychosocial burden imposed on them by European American racist practices.

Baldwin's (1979) extensive review of the literature challenged this core assumption by revealing several methodological errors and inconsistencies across and between studies. Specifically, he presented three core issues. First, studies in this area reflected inadequate construct validity, with only a few employing direct self-referent measures; second, the findings in this area seemed to be compromised by poorly designed methodology, with gross stimulus-response ambiguities, and uncontrolled experimenter effects and demand characteristics found across studies. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Baldwin found that virtually none of the prominent studies on Black self-hatred had attempted to acknowledge and/or address the cultural distinctness of Black people. Instead, they erroneously assumed the existence of cultural homogeneity between European Americans and African Americans. Baldwin challenged the notion of cultural homogeneity as wrongly assuming that the differences between Black and White people were only due to the experiences of American slavery and racial oppression. Based on these critical issues, Baldwin characterized the Black self-hatred construct as folklore and racist, and he set the stage for more culturally

relevant and empirically valid approaches to the study of African people. Later, Baldwin, Brown, and Hopkins (1991) provided an Africentric analysis that defined an Africentric, interdependent, and pro-Black conception of self as the most appropriate paradigm to understand the self-concept of people of African descent.

Delayed gratification and locus of control. Continuing Banks's focus on deconstructing problematic Eurocentric psychological theories, Banks, McQuater, Ross, and Ward (1983) challenged the predominant and primarily Eurocentric psychological literature that characterized Blacks as having (a) no motivation to achieve, (b) a negative self-concept, and (c) low social responsibility. These claims were largely couched in literature exploring the link between delayed gratification and locus of control (e.g., Mischel, 1961a).

In the early 1960s, Western scholars conceptualized the delay of gratification as the ability to voluntarily postpone immediate gratification and persist in goal-directed behavior for the sake of later outcomes (Mischel, 1961a). Locus of control was conceptualized as the extent to which individuals believe they have power over events in their lives (Rotter, 1954). In a string of studies, it was argued that people of African descent lacked the ability to delay gratification due to an external locus of control, or a sense of powerlessness. As a result, they were believed to lack social responsibility, the motivation to achieve, and the ability to attain long-term economic success (Lessing, 1969; Mischel, 1961a; Strickland, 1972; Zytoskee, Strickland, & Watson, 1971). However, when Banks and colleagues (1983) meticulously reviewed the literature, they found that much of what had been inferred from the research stood in marked contrast to the actual data. In other words, the accumulated data largely represented Blacks either as preferring delayed gratification or as indifferent toward immediate versus delayed rewards. More specifically, approximately 10 empirical investigations showed Black samples as either entirely or primarily nonpreferential toward the delay of gratification. In sharp contrast, only 3 instances of published research reflected a preference for immediate rewards among Blacks (Mischel, 1958, 1961b; Strickland, 1972). Additionally, Banks uncovered theoretical and methodological flaws in the way the construct was developed and investigated (i.e., theoretical inconsistencies and limited research design, respectively). Thus, the notion that Blacks preferred immediate gratification, due to an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, victimhood, and low agency, was largely unsubstantiated (Banks et al., 1983). This critical review and rejection of Eurocentric psychological theory laid the foundation for a more accurate, strengths-based approach to people of African descent in the field of psychology.

Intelligence testing. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a large body of literature inferred that group differences in intelligence were mainly due to race (see Alland, 2002). At the time, several European-based scientists argued that individuals of African descent were intellectually inferior to their European counterparts largely due to “genetic” differences (e.g., Jensen, 1968; Loehlin, Lindzey, & Spuhler, 1975). However, such beliefs, generally stemmed from highly subjective, culturally insensitive, and unrefined research practices, for example, cranium size evaluations (Gould, 1981). Nonetheless, several European American psychologists adopted such practices and purported them to be scientifically acceptable modes of cognitive evaluation. For example, the Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman (1916) famously adapted a French-based intelligence test that was originally normed using a sample of Whites (the Stanford-Binet test; Terman & Merrill, 1960). This test went on to become one of the most widely used intelligence tests in the field of psychology (Becker, 2003). Despite its widespread reach, Terman and other European American scholars of his time neglected to culturally validate it for individuals of African descent (Becker, 2003; McNemar, 1942; Terman & Merrill, 1960).

Black psychologist and ABPsi founder, Robert Williams (1971) took great issue with such neglect and argued against the use of such tests. More specifically, he argued that they reflected cultural bias toward White Americans as their questions seemed to only measure knowledge of European American culture rather than cognitive ability. As a result, their purported “intelligence quotient” scores would be skewed in favor of White Americans, thereby perpetuating racist ideologies and practices.

In response to the aforementioned concerns, Williams (1975) published the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity. Created in 1972, the underlying purpose of this test was to prove that intelligence testing developed and promulgated by Western scientists was culturally biased and inherently discriminatory. To test this theory, his 100-item assessment included content he believed most Black people would understand and recognize as part of their cultural experience. He then conducted a series of studies with Black and White students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. As predicted, his Black participants consistently scored much higher than their White counterparts, demonstrating that content on purported intelligence tests may lead to culturally biased results. Thus, Williams challenged and dismantled the notion that Blacks are intellectually inferior to Whites. In turn, he set a precedent for the critical examination and rejection of Eurocentric intelligence testing in this country.

Reconstruction

Black self-concept. “For the oppressed to be really free, he must go beyond revolt, by another path; he must begin other ways, conceive of himself and reconstruct himself independently of the Master” (Menemmi, 1969, as cited in Nobles, 1976, p. 15). In his seminal article “Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self-Concept,” ABPsi founder and psychologist, Wade Nobles (1976) introduced the first African-centered alternative to Eurocentric conceptualizations of the Black self. He argued that if Black psychologists are to fully liberate themselves and their communities from the chains of oppression and White domination, they must first rid themselves of “colonialistic” and “scientific” approaches to the Black self-concept.

Nobles (1976) also argued that due to the African psyche being rooted in traditional African principles, the conceptualization of the Black self-concept must be African based. Additionally, due to the inherent philosophical differences between European American and African values, he justified the need for a separate, distinct, and African-centered Black self-concept. Without one, he believed that European American psychologists would continue to promulgate a culturally inaccurate and deficit-based narrative about African people (e.g., the notion of Black self-hatred). More specifically, he argued that when African “data” (the core values of African people) are processed by the guiding principles of European American psychology, the results distort the integrity of the original nature of the data. He further explained that the European worldview is tempered with the general guiding principles of “survival of the fittest” and “control over nature,” resulting in an overemphasis on competition, individual rights, and the position of independence and separateness. In contrast, the guiding principles of the African worldview are “survival of the tribe” and being “one with nature.” As a result, the values and customs consistent with the African self-concept are characteristically reflective of a sense of cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility. Similarly, the emphasis in African psycho-behavioral modalities is not on individuality and difference but, rather, on commonality, groupness, and similarity.

Nobles’s (1976) cardinal point, therefore, in understanding the traditional African conception of self is the belief of “I am because We are, and because We are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1970, as cited in Nobles, 1976) (p. 20). One’s self-definition as an African individual depends on the corporate definition of one’s people rather than on one’s “uniqueness,” one’s “individuality,” or, in the case of Black people, one’s oppression. In other words, the notion of interdependence and oneness of being allows for a conception of self that transcends through history, absolute time, and the finiteness of the physical body.

Thus, as a way to empower Black psychologists and Black people as a whole, Nobles (1976) called for the full embrace of traditional African tenets not only within the field of Black psychology but also globally. In so doing, he ignited the reconstruction of the “so-called Negro self-concept” and offered a more accurate, empowering, and authentically African self-conception.

Racial identity. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/2013) famously described the conundrum of Black identity development in America:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 2)

In response to Du Bois's poignant words, William Cross (1971) proposed one of the first models of Black racial identity development in psychology. Like many other Black scholars of his time, Cross asserted that true liberation is due, in part, to the rejection of Eurocentric self-conceptualizations and acceptance of a Black-centered identity formation. He therefore developed the nigrescence model to capture this process.

Often hailed as one of the most influential theories of Black racial identity in the psychological literature (Cokley & Chapman, 2009; Helms, 1990; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2011), Cross's (1971) theory of psychological nigrescence, which loosely translates to “the process of becoming Black,” describes Black racial identity development as a five-stage process. The first stage, coined as the Pre-Encounter, is associated with low racial salience or a reluctance to view oneself as a member of the Black race. It is also associated with the endorsement of negative stereotypic views about Blackness as well as Black self-hatred. The next stage, Encounter, is characterized by an increased awareness of racial oppression and a reexamination of the aforementioned Pre-Encounter attitudes. Due, in part, to this reexamination and potential cognitive dissonance, individuals may then move to the Immersion-Emersion stage where they attempt to abandon their old selves for a new Black identity. The fourth stage, Internalization, is characterized by a positive acceptance of one's Black identity without the romanticization of Blackness and the hatred of Whiteness. The fifth stage, Internalization-Commitment, is characterized by individuals who have internalized a positive Black identity while also being committed to fighting against racial oppression.

Over the years, Cross's (1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001) thinking about Black racial identity evolved in response to empirical work and theoretical critiques. For example, Internalization became associated with two identities: Afrocentricity (i.e., an immersion in African-centered beliefs and values) and Multiculturalist Inclusive (i.e., an endorsement of a multicultural perspective that is inclusive of other minority groups; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2011; Worrell, Vandiver, Cross, & Fhagen-Smith, 2004). In the expanded nigrescence model (Vandiver et al., 2011), Immersion-Emersion was theorized to include two distinct but empirically related identities: intense Black involvement (i.e., deep psychological and physical engagement in Black culture, traditions, and values) and anti-White attitudes (i.e., an overt rejection of White culture, traditions, and values). The Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (BRIAS; Helms & Parham, 1996; Parham & Helms, 1981) was developed to operationalize Cross's original nigrescence model. For years, the BRIAS was the instrument of choice in Black racial identity research. It helped to cement the importance of racial identity in the psychological literature. Due to its psychometric limitations and the evolution of Cross's theorizing about nigrescence, the Cross Racial Identity Scale (Vandiver et al., 2011) was developed. Since its development, it has become one of the most widely used and highly regarded racial identity tools in the field of Black psychology and beyond (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015).

Another important contribution of racial identity research was ushered in by Robert Sellers and his colleagues (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). They introduced the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI). The MMRI is informed by social identity theories and is based on the assumption that race is one of several salient social identities for African Americans. The MMRI asks, "How important is race in the individual's perception of self" and "What does it mean to be a member of this racial group?" The MMRI consists of four dimensions that measure both the qualitative meaning and the significance of race in the self-concepts of African Americans: racial salience, racial centrality, racial regard, and racial ideology. Racial salience is the extent to which race is a relevant part of one's self-concept. Racial centrality is the extent to which a person normatively defines herself or himself racially. Racial regard is a person's affective and evaluative judgment of her or his race, and it consists of both private and public regard. Racial ideology is the individual's beliefs, opinions, and attitudes regarding how members of the race should act (Sellers et al., 1998). The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) was created to operationalize the MMRI (Sellers et al., 1998). A search in PsycINFO reveals that it is the most popular Black racial identity scale used in the psychological literature. Perhaps more than any other topic in

Black psychology, racial identity has been widely researched by Black and non-Black psychologists in the psychological literature.

Cultural mistrust. During the height of the civil rights movement, psychology scholars began to explore the ways in which racism influenced interactions between Blacks and Whites. One line of research was that of “cultural paranoia.” In the book *Black Rage*, two Harvard psychiatrists (Grier & Cobbs, 1968) coined the phrase *cultural paranoia* to denote that African Americans had developed mistrust toward Whites due to historical and contemporary experiences with racism and oppression. While some Black scholars agreed with this assertion, they argued that the use of the word *paranoia* to describe adaptive behavior on the part of African Americans was inappropriate. In addition, they believed such terminology echoed Eurocentric standards of normative behavior. One such scholar was Francis Terrell (Terrell & Terrell, 1981), who argued that other cultural groups (i.e., European Americans) had already coined a plethora of pathological terms to explain a wide range of behaviors commonly seen among Blacks. Therefore, the Black community did not need any additional labels of condescension. In turn, he rejected the use of the term *cultural paranoia* and introduced a new term he deemed more accurate.

Unlike *cultural paranoia*, and other terms that seemed to imply psychopathological behavior among Blacks, Francis and Sandra Terrell (1981) believed that *cultural mistrust* more accurately reflected the true nonpathological behavior of Black people in the United States. More precisely, they rejected the notion that Blacks exhibited “paranoid” tendencies toward Whites, as they and other Black psychologists believed it carried an imperious connotation. Moreover, they argued that what some scholars may conceptualize as “paranoia” may, in fact, be a reasonable and natural response to perpetual experiences with racism. Therefore, their contribution to the discourse in the predominant literature signified a nonpathological departure. It also represented an important extension through the development and validation of the first scale to measure cultural mistrust. As the oldest, most comprehensive and commonly used measure of cultural mistrust (Neville, Tynes, & Utsey, 2008), the Cultural Mistrust Inventory (CMI; Terrell & Terrell, 1981) measures the extent to which Blacks mistrust Whites across various settings. In a meta-analysis comparing the findings of more than 20 independent studies that had utilized the CMI, Whaley (2001) determined that the total score on the CMI was a good predictor of the behavior of Blacks in general, such as premature termination rates and poorer intelligence quotient test performance when tested by a White examiner versus a Black examiner. It, therefore, is not surprising that since their development

in 1981, the concept of cultural mistrust and the CMI have continued to be utilized by scholars to better understand the psychology of Black-White interactions in this country.

Construction

Black people, despite their history of overcoming adversity, are generally viewed in the role of reactors rather than actors, of the manipulated rather than the manipulators. . . . It therefore seems to be a basic and prevailing assumption in Euro-American social science that Black people have survived in this society not by their collective sophistication and ingenuity, but rather by mere coincidence, faulty and haphazard methods or some gift of benevolence from Euro-American society. (Baldwin, 1979, p. 54)

Contrary to the aforementioned assumption, people of African descent, on their own merits, have always been and continue to be innovators, pioneers, and creators (Potter, Claytor, & Muñoz, 1994; Potter, 2013). Indeed, despite facing overwhelmingly difficult obstacles in a perpetually oppressive society, Black people have not only survived but have continued to thrive in all aspects of life. The field of Black psychology is no exception. In addition to deconstructing and reconstructing the errors of Eurocentric psychology, Black psychologists have also been intentional about constructing new theories that accurately reflect and honor the spirit of African agency and scholarship. Two exemplary constructionists in the field of Black psychology are Linda James Myers and Kobi Kambon (a.k.a. Joseph Baldwin).

Worldview. Since the development of African psychology as a distinct disciplinary field, there has been a clear movement toward defining it in relation to an African worldview. Whether referred to as African, Africentric, African-centered, or Africana psychology, the underlying push has always been toward a field rooted in worldview components that allow for the behavioral, mental, and spiritual tendencies of African people to be best understood in relation to African philosophical thought. Thus, central to the field of African-centered psychology has been the use of an African worldview as a conceptual and philosophical framework.

In 1980, Kambon spoke to the relevance of worldview systems and their potential racial origins. Building upon the work of other Black scholars (Dixon, 1976; Nobles, 1978), he provided context for the role of race as an essential component for understanding the distinct nature of worldview systems. He did so by first providing clarity on his understanding of definitional systems and their relation to worldviews. He argued that a definitional

system, in its broadest sense, is essentially the same as the “worldview” of a social system and is about race:

Race constitutes the principal binding condition underlying the evolution of definitional systems. Such systems, in their most basic and fundamental nature therefore have a “racial character”; that is, they are peculiarly specific to the racial-cultural group with which they are identified. Thus, each racial group can therefore be regarded as having its own distinct definitional system or worldview. (Baldwin, 1980, p. 98)

In turn, identification as a Black American implies a shared history, belief system, and culture, which undergirds a distinct worldview. In other words, Baldwin (1980) made the theoretical argument for the interconnectedness of racial identity and worldview among Blacks in this country. This view represented a novel shift in the psychological literature, as worldview differences were primarily understood to be cultural in nature prior to his work. He, therefore, added a new and important dimension to the worldview discussion among Black scholars in the field of psychology and Black/African studies.

Linda James Myers has also been a central voice in advancing the worldview framework within Black psychology. However, her conceptualization of the African worldview differed slightly from Kambon's. Specifically, while Kambon's (Baldwin, 1980) worldview analysis was primarily race specific, Myers's (1993) analysis was mainly humanistic. In other words, while supporting the reality of fundamental philosophical differences between African people and individuals of European descent, Myers (1999) asserted that the African, or “optimal,” worldview can unite humanity. Moreover, in her now classic book *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology* (Myers, 1993), she conceptualized an optimal worldview for Blacks as well as other oppressed people in this country. In introducing this worldview, she notes that an individual's perspective, regardless of race, is largely influenced by how he or she perceives the world. In turn, the world one sees, hears, and feels through one's senses is not an external world but, rather, one's projection of reality. Therefore, Myers argues that understanding the perceptual system of the dominant European culture is critical to understanding how suboptimal knowledge about the external world is acquired. She underscores this argument by highlighting the distinct differences between a European and an African worldview. While a Eurocentric lens is largely based on the finite, the material, and external appearances, an African (and, ultimately, optimal) lens is based on the infinite, the Divine, and an internal compass. Those who adopt the former lens acquire an identity and self-worth that are

based on criteria such as material possessions and job titles. In contrast, those who adopt the latter acquire an identity and self-worth that are based on an overall sense of well-being. Thus, Myers urged Black Americans and other marginalized groups to adopt an African worldview in order to transcend the chains of mental slavery. In so doing, she also laid the foundation for the widely popular field of positive psychology.

African self-consciousness. Relatedly, the pioneering work of Kobi Kambon has mainly centered on the importance of the Africentric approach to addressing mental health concerns in the Black community. In his classic article “African Self Consciousness and the Mental Health of African-Americans,” Baldwin (1984) expresses concern about the prevalence of mental health “disorders” in the Black community. However, unlike his Eurocentric counterparts, he does not defer to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5;* American Psychiatric Association, 2013) to assess such concerns. Instead, he develops a new, culturally relevant approach to Black mental health, his Africentric model of Black personality.

In this model, Baldwin (1984) posits that the African personality is the biogenetic core of every individual of African descent. Couched in the African personality is African self-extension orientation and African self-consciousness. African self-extension orientation is the unconscious collective expression of African spirituality and wholeness. African self-consciousness is the extent to which African people embrace and reflect Africentric principles. Baldwin also describes it as malleable and subject to external influences. That is, it depends on the extent to which socialization experiences and/or significant institutional-systemic processes actively nurture or hinder the Black personality system of interconnectedness, self-extension orientation, and spirituality. He, therefore, argues that “disorders” occur at the level of African self-consciousness when socialization and/or experiential indoctrination processes reflect an “alien,” or non-African, cosmology (as is the case in European American society). However, they may be mitigated or completely avoided by resisting a Eurocentric or alien cosmology in favor of an Africentric one.

To test the aforementioned model, Baldwin developed the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). It has since been utilized extensively to measure the extent to which Blacks embrace an Africentric cosmology (e.g., Baldwin, Duncan, & Bell, 1987; Bhagwat, Kelly, & Lambert, 2012; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005; Witherspoon & Speight, 2009). In the psychological literature, the theory of African self-consciousness has been associated with healthy personality functioning (Baldwin et al., 1991), a preference for emotional and intellectual stimulation (Bell, Bouie, &

Baldwin, 1990), and commitment to the Black community (Hamlet, 1998). Taken together, the theory of African self-consciousness and its adjoining scale have greatly contributed to the field of psychology by offering an unapologetically African-centered, strengths-based approach to mental health for people of African descent.

Cultural misorientation. In addition to his work on African self-consciousness, Kambon has also contributed to the field of psychology by creating the Cultural Misorientation (CM) paradigm and its adjoining scale. In his books and articles (Baldwin, 1984; Kambon, 1992, 2003), he describes CM as a psychological disorder of European "misidentification" or, stated more directly, the internalization of the European worldview among Africans. In other words, CM refers to a Eurocentric, "anti-African" self-consciousness consistent with, and, therefore reinforced by, European American culture in American society. It is important to note that Kambon (2003) uses the term *psychological disorder* to underscore the potentially damaging psychological effects of adopting a culturally incongruent and anti-African worldview. More precisely, due to its inability to foster self-affirmative and efficacious functioning in African people, an internalized Eurocentric worldview may ultimately lead to psychological destruction; namely, it may cause African people to behave in ways that undermine or negate their indigenous cultural affirmation and empowerment.

While the CM paradigm holds that virtually all Africans in America have been affected by and/or afflicted with this disorder (Baldwin, 1984; Kambon, 1992, 2003), it is believed that there are individual differences in the way it affects them. Thus, Kambon describes three levels of CM, minimal, moderate, and severe, with the first level reflecting a slight cultural misorientation and the last reflecting extreme internalization of Eurocentric values (Baldwin, 1984; Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Kambon, 1992, 2003). In order to empirically assess the nature and levels of CM directly, Kambon (1997) developed and validated the Cultural Misorientation Scale. In so doing, he pioneered the first psychometric tool to measure the adverse impact of Eurocentric cultural oppression on the Black psyche.

Summary. Constructionists have played an important role in the growth of Black/African psychology by providing new avenues for theory building and empirical testing of African-centered constructs that are completely independent from Eurocentric psychology. It is our observation, however, that more work needs to be done in this area to ensure continued growth in the disciplinary field of Black/African psychology.

Black Psychology as a Precursor to Positive and Multicultural Psychology

By now it should be clear that Black/African psychology is not the “blackening” of Eurocentric psychology, as Baldwin (1989) and others have argued. Black/African psychology has been relentless and steadfast in articulating a different psychology from the excesses of an individualistic, empirical, “objective,” and ultimately deficit-oriented psychology that has historically characterized Eurocentric psychological approaches to Black people.

One of the characteristics that has distinguished Black/African psychology from Eurocentric psychology is Black/African psychologists’ unwavering belief in the humanity and potentiality of Black people and their ability to transcend (and not be defined by) racial oppression. This characteristic can be seen in the modern positive psychology movement, with its emphasis on wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Prior to the introduction of positive psychology as a new domain of psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), Black psychologists, such as White, had long articulated the principles of a positive and strengths-based psychology. From his earliest publications, White talked (1970a, 1970b) about the strengths and positive psychology of Black people. White (1970a) insisted that Black psychologists “must try to develop the kind of psychological model that accounts for the strengths in our children” (p. 53). White believed that Black children had learned to negotiate their challenging and stressful environments by showing psychological cleverness and originality, developing survival skills, and demonstrating mental toughness. Instead of seeing Black children (and by extension Black adults) as inferior, having cultural deficits, and culturally deprived, White argued that Black people were resilient in the face of racial oppression and had cultural strengths and healthy, positive identities. For White, Black psychology was characterized by basic African American psychological concepts, such as resilience and spirituality. Thus, a strengths-based Black psychology predates modern positive psychology and should be considered as the original positive psychology rooted in the positive human functioning of Black people in the midst of dehumanization and racial oppression.

White’s contribution to psychology was not just as a precursor of the positive psychology movement. His seminal article “Toward a Black Psychology” (White, 1970b) was the first piece of scholarship that described a psychology of Black behavior and culture in nondeficit terms. He challenged the application of traditional psychological theories to Black people and has been credited with helping to usher in the multicultural psychology movement in psychology. Indeed, prominent leaders in multicultural psychology (e.g.,

Derald Wing Sue, Janet Helms, Thomas Parham) cite the influence of Joseph White in their own professional development.

As one of the founders of the ABPsi, White was committed to helping other ethnic minorities define their own racial and cultural truths. Black/African psychology, as exemplified by the ABPsi, has served as a model of intellectual independence and self-determination in the creation of other ethnic minority psychological associations (e.g., Asian American Psychological Association, National Latinx Psychological Association, Society of Indian Psychologists, Middle Eastern and North African Psychological Association).

Perhaps the most significant intellectual contribution of Black psychology to multicultural psychology has been the scholarship on racial identity. In fact, racial identity development has been identified as one of the three most important themes in multicultural psychology, and an area that needs further research in multicultural counseling (Ponterotto, 1998; Ponterotto & Sabnani, 1989). In the first content analysis with a multicultural focus, Ponterotto and Sabnani (1989) identified a classic article by Thomas Parham and Janet Helms (1981) on the topic of racial identity as the most cited empirical article. It should be noted that both Parham and Helms have been recognized as Distinguished Black Psychologists by ABPsi. Parham, in particular, has been an active contributor to the Black/African psychology literature and is a member of ABPsi. It is noteworthy that two distinguished Black psychologists and scholars of racial identity are the authors of the most cited empirical article in the multicultural literature.

Conclusion

The field of Black/African psychology has forever changed the character and practice of psychology. Black psychologists have long challenged the hegemonic paradigms and racist beliefs perpetuated by Eurocentric approaches to psychology. In spite of this fact, Black students (and, in fact, all students) remain largely unaware of the historical and contemporary influences of Black/African psychology, and how these influences have impacted the discipline of psychology. In this article, we have attempted to provide a corrective lens by identifying the many ways in which Black/African psychology has challenged prevailing beliefs in psychology about Black behavior and culture. Without the efforts of Black psychologists grounded in the deconstructionist Black psychology tradition, notions of (a) White preference among Blacks, (b) Black self-hatred, (c) Blacks' inability to delay gratification and external locus of control, and (d) Black intellectual inferiority would likely still be the defining themes of psychological research conducted on Black people. Without the efforts of Black

psychologists grounded in the reconstructionist Black psychology tradition, there would be continued misunderstandings about the nature of Black self-concept, Black racial identity, and the adaptive functions of cultural mistrust. Finally, without the efforts of Black psychologists grounded in the constructionist Black psychology tradition, psychological research on Black people would still only reflect the use of Eurocentric psychological theories and concepts and not include liberating African-centered psychological theories and concepts like worldview, African self-consciousness, and cultural misorientation. We hope this article inspires the next generation of Black psychologists to continue the intellectual legacy of Black/African psychology in perpetuity.

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Notes

1. Acknowledgment of these individuals' contributions is not intended to minimize or slight the historical importance of the first Black man (Francis Sumner, in 1920) and the first Black woman (Inez Prosser, in 1933) to receive a PhD in psychology. Sumner and Prosser preceded the zeitgeist that led to the articulation and creation of Black/African psychology.
2. We note that the ABPsi, the *Journal of Black Psychology*, and many other Black outlets did not exist during the publication of the doll studies.
3. The authors note that there is disagreement about Karenga's classification of schools of thought, particularly his definition of the radical school. Specifically, it has been argued that work can be radical without adopting an African-centered framework (H. Neville, personal communication, July 21, 2018). The authors concede this point.

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