

Chapter 1

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Introduction to African American Psychology

If you know the beginning well, the end will not trouble you.

Wolof proverb

Learning Objectives

- To define and conceptualize African American psychology
- To become familiar with some of the historical events in African American psychology
- To become knowledgeable about critical events in the development of African American psychology
- To identify influential African American psychologists
- To identify the status of African American psychology today
- To identify methodological issues in studying African American psychology

The Racist Beginnings of Standardized Testing

By John Rosales and Tim Walker

From grade school to college, students of color have suffered from the effects of biased testing.

As many students return to in-person learning for the first time in almost a year, states and school districts are also beginning to gear up for statewide standardized testing, as required by the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

In April 2020, as the pandemic engulfed the nation and forced schools to close, the department granted a "blanket waiver" to every state to skip mandated statewide testing for 2019-20. Last month, however, ED officials announced it was mandating schools to administer some form of statewide assessment for 2020-21.

Educators across the country criticized the decision, saying the idea that students should be forced to take any sort of standardized test this year is incomprehensible. The priority right now should be on strengthening instruction and

support for students and families in communities most traumatized by the impact of the coronavirus.

Many of these same communities have suffered the most from high-stakes testing. Since their inception almost a century ago, the tests have been instruments of racism and a biased system. Decades of research demonstrate that Black, Latin(o/a/x), and Native students, as well as students from some Asian groups, experience bias from standardized tests administered from early childhood through college.

"We still think there's something wrong with the kids rather than recognizing their something wrong with the tests," Ibram X. Kendi of the Antiracist Research & Policy Center at Boston University and author of *How to be an Antiracist* said in October 2020. "Standardized tests have become the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade Black and Brown minds and legally exclude their bodies from prestigious schools."

Yet some organizations insist on *more* testing, arguing that the data will expose the gaps where support and resources should be directed.

Standardized tests, however, have never been accurate and reliable measures of student learning.

"While much has been said about the racial achievement gap as a civil rights issue, more attention needs to be paid to the measurement tools used to define that gap," explains Young Wan Choi, manager of performance assessments for the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, Calif. "Education reformists, civil rights organizations, and all who are concerned with racial justice in education need to advocate for assessment tools that don't replicate racial and economic inequality."

Testing Pioneer – and Eugenicist

"To tell the truth about standardized tests," Kendi said, "is to tell the story of the eugenicists who created and popularized these tests in the United States more than a century ago."

As the United States absorbed millions of immigrants from Europe beginning in the 19th century, the day's leading social scientists, many of them White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, were concerned by the infiltration of non-Whites into the nation's public schools.

In his 1923 book, *A Study of American Intelligence*, psychologist and eugenicist Carl Brigham wrote that African-Americans were on the low end of the racial, ethnic, and/or cultural spectrum. Testing, he believed, showed the superiority of "the Nordic race group" and warned of the "promiscuous intermingling" of new immigrants in the American gene pool.

Furthermore, the education system he argued was in decline and "will proceed with an accelerating rate as the racial mixture becomes more and more extensive."

Shortly after the publication of *A Study of American Intelligence* in 1923, the College Board commissioned Carl Brigham to lead development of the SAT.

Brigham had helped to develop aptitude tests for the U.S. Army during World War I and—commissioned by the College Board—was influential in the development of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). At the time, he and other social scientists considered the SAT a new psychological test and a supplement to existing college board exams.

The SAT debuted in 1926, joined by the ACT (American College Testing) in the 1950s. By the 21st century, the SAT and ACT were just part of a barrage of tests students may face before reaching college. The College Board also offers SAT II tests, designed for individual subjects ranging from biology to geography.

Entrenched in Schools

Brigham's PhD dissertation, written in 1916, *Variable Factors in the Binet Tests*, analyzed the work of the French psychologist Alfred Binet, who developed intelligence

tests as diagnostic tools to detect learning disabilities. The Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman relied on Binet's work to produce today's standard IQ test, the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Tests.

During World War I, standardized tests helped place 1.5 million soldiers in units segregated by race and by test scores. The tests were scientific, yet they remained deeply biased, according to researchers and media reports.

In 1917, Terman and a group of colleagues were recruited by the American Psychological Association to help the Army develop group intelligence tests and a group intelligence scale. Army testing during World War I ignited the most rapid expansion of the school testing movement.

"The tests have failed time and again to achieve their intended purposes: measuring intelligence and predicting future academic and professional success. The tests, not the Black test-takers, have been underachieving." - Ibram X. Kendi

By 1918, there were more than 100 standardized tests, developed by different researchers to measure achievement in the principal elementary and secondary school subjects. The U.S. Bureau of Education reported in 1925 that intelligence and achievement tests were increasingly used to classify students at all levels.

The first SAT was administered in 1926 to more than 8,000 students, 40 percent of them female. The original test lasted 90 minutes and consisted of 315 questions focused on vocabulary and basic math.

"Unlike the college boards, the SAT is designed primarily to assess aptitude for learning rather than mastery of subjects already learned," according to Erik Jacobsen, a New Jersey writer and math-physics teacher based at Newark Academy in Livingston, N.J. "For some college officials, an aptitude test, which is presumed to measure intelligence, is appealing since at this time (1926) intelligence and ethnic origin are thought to be connected, and therefore the results of such a test could be used to limit the admissions of particularly undesirable ethnicities."

By 1930, multiple-choice tests were firmly entrenched in U.S. schools. The rapid spread of the SAT sparked debate along two lines. Some critics viewed the multiple-choice format as encouraging memorization and guessing. Others examined the content of the questions and reached the conclusion that the tests were racist.

Eventually, Brigham adapted the Army test for use in college admissions, and his work began to interest interested administrators at Harvard University. Starting in 1934, Harvard adopted the SAT to select scholarship recipients at the school. Many institutions of higher learning soon followed suit.

The Triumph of Pseudo-Science

In his essay "The Racist Origins of the SAT," Gil Troy calls Brigham a "Pilgrim-pedigreed, eugenics-blinded bigot." Eugenics is often defined as the science of improving a human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics. It was developed by Francis Galton as a method of improving the human race. Only after the perversion of its doctrines by the Nazis in World War II was the theory dismissed.

"All-American decency and idealism coexisted uncomfortably with these scientists' equally American racism and close-mindedness," Troy writes.

Binet, Terman, and Brigham stood at the intersection of powerful intellectual, ideological, and political trends a century ago when the Age of Science and standardization began, according to Troy.

"In (those) consensus-seeking times, scientists became obsessed with deviations and handicaps, both physical and intellectual," Troy states. "And many social scientists, misapplying Charles Darwin's evolving evolutionary science, and eugenics' pseudo-science, worried about maintaining white purity."

Decades of Racial Bias

By the 1950s and 1960s, top U.S. universities were talent-searching for the “brainy kids,” regardless of ethnicity, states Jerome Karabel in *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton*.

This dictum among universities to identify the brightest students as reflected by test scores did not bode well for students from communities of color, who were—as a result of widespread bias in testing—disproportionately failing state or local high school graduation exams, according to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing (Fair Test).

According to Fair Test, on average, students of color score lower on college admissions tests, thus many capable youth are denied entrance or access to so-called “merit” scholarships, contributing to the huge racial gap in college enrollments and completion.

High-stakes testing also causes additional damage to some students who are categorized as English language learners (ELLs). The tests are often inaccurate for ELLs, according to Fair Test, leading to misplacement or retention. ELLs are, alongside students with disabilities, those least likely to pass graduation tests.

Source: Rosales, J., & Walker, T. (2021). The racist beginnings of standardized testing. *NEA Today*. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/racist-beginnings-standardized-testing>

Introduction, Definitions, and Conceptual Frameworks

The cover story illustrates how testing, a prominent aspect of American psychology, has at its core a racist history that continues to permeate today. African American psychology was conceived, in part, to move beyond this history and articulate a psychology for people of African descent defined by people of African descent.

African American psychology encompasses many topics. This chapter provides definitions and discusses conceptual frameworks for studying and understanding African American psychology. We then examine historical influences on the study of African American psychology. The contributions of Black psychologists in defining and conceptualizing African American psychology are discussed in a section on self-determination. The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) has been instrumental in defining and promoting the psychology of Black people. Following the “Self-Determination” section, we review the current status of African American psychology. Methodological issues are addressed, followed by a critical analysis. The chapter ends with a summary.

What Is African American Psychology?

Who Are African Americans and Other Racial/Ethnic Groups?

Before defining African American psychology, we define and provide data on African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups. The U.S. Census (2022) defines *Black* or *African American* as “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.” It includes people who indicate their race as “Black, African American, or Negro” or who provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or

Haitian. In this book, the term *African American* is generally used. However, in some cases, the term *Black* is used to retain the authors' intent in the literature cited. African Americans may identify with other racial groups, and people of any race may be of Hispanic/Latine ethnic background.

This book refers to other racial/ethnic groups and provides definitions of these groups. White—a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa; Native American/American Indian or Alaska Native—a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment; Asian—a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander—a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines Hispanic as a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (U.S. Census, 2022). See Table 1.1 for statistics on the percentage of racial/ethnic groups in the United States. The terms *White*, *Latino*, and *Asian* will generally be used in this book. However, other terms (e.g., *non-Latino White*, *Hispanic*, *Latine*) may be used to retain the authors' intent in the information cited and/or to reflect more inclusive language.

Table 1.1 ■ Race and Ethnicity of United States Population

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage
White alone	75.3
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	58.4
Black/African American alone	13.7
Asian alone	6.4
Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.3
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	.3
Two or more races	3.1
Hispanic/Latino	19.5

Source: U. S. Census Bureau. (2023).

46.8 million people in the United States identify as Black, and the Black population is diverse (Tamir, 2021). Blacks' racial identification has changed over the past two decades, with more Blacks identifying with more than one race and ethnic group (Tamir, 2021). Eighty-seven percent of Black people identified their race as Black alone and their ethnicity as non-Hispanic, and 8% identified their race as Black and another race (most often White) and not Hispanic. Another 5% self-identified as both Black and Hispanic. These percentages contrast with those reported in 2000, where 93% identified their race as Black alone. It is important to note that African Americans are diverse and may identify

as African American, Black, Black American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latine, African, or some other designation. The diversity among African Americans is partly shaped by whether they are descendants of enslaved people who arrived in North or South America, or more recent immigrants. Research discussed in this book examines similarities and differences among Black Americans based on whether they were born in this country.

African American Psychology Defined

Several scholars have defined African American, Black, and African psychology. J. A. Baldwin (1986)—aka Kambon—defines Black psychology this way:

African (Black) Psychology is defined as a system of knowledge (philosophy, definitions, concepts, models, procedures, and practice) concerning the nature of the social universe from the perspectives of African cosmology. Black psychology is nothing more or less than the uncovering, articulation, operationalization, and application of the principles of the African reality structure relative to psychological phenomena. (p. 242)

Fairchild (2000) defines African American psychology as follows:

African American psychology is the body of knowledge that is concerned with the understanding of African American life and culture. ... African American psychology focuses on the mental, physical, psychological, and spiritual nature of humanity. It is the collection of works that has been produced by African psychologists in the United States (African Americans) and throughout the world. (p. 93)

African American psychology has been studied primarily from two perspectives. The first perspective is that psychological concepts and theories are universal; thus, African Americans can be studied using universal laws and principles. Research on topics such as minority stress, stereotype threat, and identity assumes that people across diverse cultural groups will exhibit similar behavior in similar situations and contexts. The second perspective, taken from African-centered scholars, is that African American psychology is the psychology of people of African descent, and African beliefs and behaviors are central to the study of African Americans. In this book, we use a convergent approach that captures both perspectives.

Baldwin's definition encompasses an African-centered perspective. African-centered psychology is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. African-centered psychology considers core values, beliefs, and behaviors found among people of African descent that are central to understanding African Americans. Likewise, Azibo (1996) considers African American psychology, African or Black psychology. He writes, "All human life processes including the spiritual, mental, biological, genetic, and behavioral constitute African psychology" (pp. 6–7). In these definitions, Baldwin and Azibo do not make a distinction between African psychology and African American psychology, arguing that all people with origins in Africa are African.

One way to understand the two perspectives on the psychology of African Americans is to consider the differences between the schools of thought regarding Black or African psychology (Azibo, 1996). One school of thought is pro-Black, and the other is African. In contrasting the two, Azibo notes that the pro-Black school of thought has focused on the African in the U.S. experience and has yet to use the African structure to provide the framework for interpreting the experience of African Americans. Although this Black

school of thought has been useful in changing myths about African Americans based on a deficit model, it does not capture the core of the African experience. To capture the core of the African experience, Azibo advocates that an African-centered proactive school of thought be taken. This school believes that African philosophy is critical to understanding the psychology of Black or African people. To understand African American behavior, one must understand the behavior of Africans.

Baldwin similarly distinguishes between Black and African psychology (Baldwin, 1991). According to Baldwin, Black psychology was formed as a reaction to Western psychology. The Black psychological approach concerns itself with the psychological consequence of being Black in America. However, Baldwin argues that because African people existed before European people as a distinct cultural group, a distinct African psychology existed, irrespective of when and how social scientists articulated it. Baldwin makes the point that, indeed, Black psychology is African psychology.

Convergent Perspectives

There are convergent viewpoints in conceptualizing the psychology of African Americans. Both perspectives acknowledge that African American psychology is a science consistent with a Western conceptualization of psychology; it is organized and structured. This means there is a systematic approach to understanding the psychology of African Americans, although there may be disagreement on the methods used for conducting scientific work. Both perspectives consider the scope and content of African or African American psychology as broad and diverse. African or African American psychology includes the study of behaviors and thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and social interactions. All perspectives underscore the importance of self-definition and self-determination. For example, from the standpoint of African-centered scholars, self-knowledge is a requisite for achieving well-being. Similarly, other psychological perspectives emphasize that striving for self-determination is essential to human well-being (Bandura, 1977; Jenkins, 1995).

African and Western Psychology

African American psychology can be distinguished from Western psychology not only by the population studied (i.e., African Americans) but also by the nature of the discipline. Azibo (1996) distinguishes African psychology from Western psychology by its nature and essence. According to Azibo, the essence of African psychology was seen in the practice of the people from Kemet (i.e., ancient Egypt, the cradle of one of the first civilizations). The Kemet approach to understanding humans was through self-realization, whereas Western psychology was through domination (Kambon, 1998).

One feature of Western psychology is the importance placed on observable behavior. Although Freud's influence made the unconscious part of the scope of Western psychology, psychology has primarily focused on that which can be observed. The focus on observable behavior is attributed to the great weight that Western psychology has placed on the prediction and control of people's behavior. African psychology considers self-knowledge and intuition as necessary as that which is observable (Grills, 2004; Myers, 1992).

In summary, there is no one definition of African American psychology. The definition depends on the perspective taken regarding the influence of African, American, or Western cultures on the psychology of African Americans. We acknowledge both African and American or Western influences on behavior.

Historical Perspective on the Psychological Study of African Americans

Origins of African Psychology

According to Azibo (1996), African American psychology began in ancient Kemet (now called Egypt), a civilization that began around 3200 BC. Azibo writes that African psychology can be traced to the period during which Africans produced an “organized system of knowledge (philosophy, definitions, concepts, models, procedures, and practice) concerning the nature of the social universe” (p. 4). From this perspective, African American psychology preexisted Western psychology. African psychology is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

On the other hand, Greek philosophy is credited with the origin of Western psychology. The word *psychology* is derived from the Greek words *psyche*, which means “soul or mind,” and *ology*, which means “study of.”

European Scientists’ Contribution to Racism

As the cover story illustrates, the psychology of Blacks in Europe and the United States has been racist as exemplified by testing and other studies that focused on the intellectual and cognitive inferiority of Blacks. Of note, in 2021, the American Psychological Association apologized for its role in perpetuating racism (APA, 2021a).

Robert Guthrie’s seminal book *Even the Rat Was White*, first published in 1976, addressed this racist history. A second edition was published in 1998. This book reviews the contributions of the European scientific community in influencing American psychology and beliefs about Blacks and how people with African heritage had been studied over the previous two centuries. The book illustrates how scientific racism contributed to the perception of the inferiority of Black individuals and provided justification for racism and oppression. Contributions from Guthrie’s book are highlighted next.

Comparative Studies in Physical Anthropology

Studies by physical anthropologists in the late 18th and 19th centuries compared differences in the physical attributes of Blacks and Whites (Guthrie, 1976/1998). These included skin color, hair texture, skull shape and size, facial structure, and posture. Observed differences were always found in favor of the superiority of Whites and the inferiority of Blacks. Studies examining skull size as an indicator of intelligence concluded that the Black man’s skull and brain were smaller and, therefore, less complex than the White brain.

In 1898, the Cambridge Anthropological Society began a cooperative venture between psychology and anthropology. When scientists were sent to New Guinea to study the mental attributes of its residents, they concluded that the natives of the South Pacific were inferior to Westerners in all traits, including intelligence. This study was the beginning of studies of racial differences.

Darwin’s Survival of the Fittest

In 1859, Darwin published his theory on the survival of the fittest. The key assumption of this theory was that only the strongest and most intelligent could survive. According to Guthrie (1976/1998), this doctrine greatly influenced American psychology by emphasizing

individual differences, an assumption that currently underlies much of the work in psychology. The vast majority of research on African Americans within the field of psychology during the first half of the 20th century looked at individual differences in the psychological attributes of African Americans and Whites. The findings generally supported a perspective describing African Americans as inferior on individual difference variables.

Galton's Eugenics

Galton's work in the 19th century also contributed to promoting a belief in the racial inferiority of Blacks. Galton's theory was that intelligence and other personality attributes were inherited. If intelligence was inherited, then one would not expect those of lower intelligence to improve in ability (Guthrie, 1976/1998). Galton's theory of eugenics was promoted to improve the race through selective mating and sterilization. The improvement of the human race could be achieved by genetic control of those who were of inferior intelligence and those who were social deviants. The application of eugenics resulted in Black people and other people of color being disproportionately included among those who were inferior and unfit. A recent effort by a nonprofit organization, Project Prevention, to pay certain groups of women to submit to sterilization or to use other long-term forms of birth control is considered by some to be eugenics. These women are targeted because of suspected addiction to drugs, but they are also usually poor and African American (Project Prevention, n.d.).

American Scientists' Contributions to Scientific Racism

Like their European counterparts, American scientists also conducted research to support the intellectual inferiority of African Americans (Guthrie, 1976/1998). The implication of this research on social policy has adversely affected African Americans.

Jensen's (1969) work on intelligence encouraged the belief that some people were genetically inferior to others. According to Jensen, intelligence was determined at birth, and genetics or inheritance accounted for about 80% of intelligence. This theory is notably similar to eugenics. Regarding public policy, using a theory that intelligence is predetermined works to adversely affect people who may need environmental and social support to improve their conditions. For example, compensatory programs such as Head Start were designed to provide economically disadvantaged children an academic boost before beginning school. However, if the reasoning is that intelligence is fixed at birth, nothing can be done to change one's ability, and compensatory programs are likely to do little good.

Research on the intellectual inferiority of African Americans was apparent in Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) book, *The Bell Curve*. These authors presented data suggesting that intelligence differs among racial groups and that African Americans are at the lowest end of the bell curve. A major point of their book is that most social problems, especially those found among economically and socially marginalized people, cannot be solved because they are linked to intelligence, which is mainly inherited. Therefore, environmental support to solve these problems will not be useful if the social problem is due to intelligence. A broad implication of *The Bell Curve* is that the poor, the uneducated, and the unemployed—among whom African Americans constitute a sizable percentage—will live unproductive lives. Due to their lower intelligence, social programs cannot help these individuals (Haynes et al., 1995). Another implication of *The Bell Curve* is that people who are socially and intellectually inferior cause many of the social problems in this country.

The Bell Curve was subject to intense scrutiny and criticism because of its erroneous assumptions and methodological flaws (Block, 1995; Fairchild, 1994; Haynes et al., 1995). The inference of causality based on correlational data is a major methodological flaw, as is the importance given to what an intelligence test means. That is, to assume that lower intelligence scores cause social problems is erroneous when cross-sectional correlational data are used to make these assumptions. Also, the assumption that an intelligence test score is the best indicator of intelligence, adaptability, and general life success needs to be revised. Another fallacy is to conflate genetic determination with heritability. Data in *The Bell Curve* relies on heritability, but a trait can be heritable but not genetically determined (e.g., intelligence can be affected by environmental variations) (Block, 1995).

Intelligence Testing

Intelligence testing, according to Guthrie (1976/1998), was an important factor in perpetuating scientific racism during the first part of the 20th century. Binet and Spearman's work contributed to scientific racism in that intelligence testing was used to show intellectual differences between Blacks and Whites.

In 1904, a French physician, Alfred Binet, developed the Simon-Binet Scale, the forerunner of the Stanford-Binet test of intelligence that is still in use today. Charles Spearman developed the two-factor theory of intelligence, which says that mental tests measure two factors: general and specific factors. The assumption is that the general factor measures general intellectual capability. The problem with this conception of a general intelligence factor is that it emphasizes the general intellectual capacity while deemphasizing other mental attributes that may be more contextual or culturally specific (Williams et al., 2004). Intelligent behaviors can vary across cultures and contexts. For example, some cultures may view an outcome of personal achievement as a sign of intelligence, while other cultures might view cooperation as more important than individual achievement.

The earliest test of racial differences in intelligence was done using the Binet scale in 1912. In this study, Alice Strong measured the intelligence of 225 White and 1,125 Black children. Black children were also categorized according to skin color (dark, medium, and light). Strong (as quoted in Guthrie, 1976/1998) noted that the "colored children excelled in rote memory. ... However, they are inferior in aesthetics judgment, observation, reasoning, motor control, logical memory, use of words, resistance to suggestion, and in orientation or adjustment to the institutions and complexities of civilized society" (p. 64). In other words, the Black children were inferior to Whites on conceptual and intellectual attributes.

In 1916, G. O. Ferguson published a study titled *The Psychology of the Negro: An Experimental Study*. This study was considered a classic. It reported that the Negro had deficits in abstract thinking but was very capable in sensory and motor abilities. Given the capacity for these types of skills, Negroes should do manual work. Overall, much of the early work of American scientists perpetuated the myth of Black inferiority.

Intelligence testing of African American youth continues to be a debated topic, especially considering that African American children are overrepresented in special education for intellectual disabilities (Graves & Nichols, 2016). According to the National Education Association, standardized tests, including intelligence tests, have been tools of racism, and students of color, especially from low-income families, have been harmed by these tests (Rosales & Walker, 2021). See Chapter 6 for more discussion of intelligence testing.

Study of African Americans in American Psychology

In American psychology, studies of Negroes, Coloreds, Blacks, Afro-Americans, and African Americans have been conducted throughout the last century in the United States. Often, theories and conceptual frameworks that may be useful for Western psychology have been erroneously applied to the psychology of African Americans. For example, consider the concept of *self-esteem*, a frequently studied topic in Western and American psychology. In understanding self-esteem from an African and Western perspective, one must understand the difference between Western and African conceptions of the self. Self-esteem, defined from a Western perspective, is a feeling of liking and regard for one's *self*. From an African-centered perspective, the personal self is indistinguishable from the self-derived from membership in the African community (Nobles, 1991). Therefore, affiliation with one's group defines a person's view of self. The African proverb, "I am because we are and because we are, I am," characterizes this notion of the self. The notion of ubuntu also captures this notion of the self; one humanity is shaped by relationships with others (Seroto, 2021). Thus, the conceptualization of self-esteem for people of African descent may be different from that of Whites, and it also may function differently for African Americans than for Whites (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion).

Another approach taken by American psychology has been to use information gathered from non-Black populations as the norm and then compare it to African Americans. This approach is seen in using measures developed to assess individual trait differences. For example, continuing with the example of self-esteem, a measure that does not include the collective nature of self-esteem, may not be relevant for some African Americans. Given the problem of non-normative data, it is important to include African Americans and other ethnic and cultural groups within normative samples when measures are developed. Fortunately, this is changing, and more contemporary research recognizes the importance of including diverse racial/ethnic groups when measures are developed, and interventions and treatments are carried out. In recognition of the need to have diversity that includes people of color, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical Trial Diversity Act of 2023 requires as a condition of funding for a clinical trial investigating a drug or device that the application must include information on how to diversify participants in the trial. Alternatively, researchers have developed culturally specific measures and interventions for African Americans (Belgrave et al., 2016; Utsey et al., 2000).

A related problem is when methods based on Western psychology are used to study African Americans (Goings et al., 2023). As discussed in Chapter 2, the method for acquiring knowledge may differ for different cultural groups. According to African-centered scholars, self-knowledge is the most important type of knowledge and is the basis for all knowledge. Self-knowledge, then, is more important than knowledge that is acquired from the external environment. In this regard, understanding how people who participate in a research project perceive themselves may be just as important as seeing how they respond to external stimuli. Within American psychology, the preferred methodology for conducting research has been the experiment. Experiments are superior to other research methods in producing valid and factually correct information. Experiments also provide a context in which predictions—and, subsequently, control—can be more exact. However, experimentation may not be the best way to obtain information about the Black experience. Other, more naturalistic methods, such as interviewing and systematic observations,

may be more helpful singularly or in conjunction with experimental approaches. A large percentage of studies done in American psychology have focused on differences between African Americans and Whites. During the first part of the 20th century, most research on African Americans involved comparative studies that contrasted Black Americans and Whites on individual difference traits (Guthrie, 1976/1998).

This focus on differences led to African Americans being viewed as having deficits in many psychological characteristics. In fact, as stated previously, much of the earlier work in psychology focused on deficits among African Americans when compared with Whites. Studies that examine within-group differences among people of African descent are just as important to aid us in understanding why some Blacks do well and others do not. In the next section, we provide an overview of earlier comparative studies done on African Americans.

Comparative Studies

The vast majority of the studies conducted by psychologists on African Americans during the first half of the 20th century were studies that compared Coloreds, Negroes, and Blacks with Whites. These studies examined differences between African Americans and Whites in intelligence, mental ability, and personality. Studies were conducted with children, adolescents, and adults. Studies on intellectual differences employed standard individual intelligence tests such as the Stanford-Binet and group tests to assess mental functioning. One test used was the Army Classification Battery (ACB). The ACB was developed by the Army to assess soldiers' aptitude on different assignments. The ACB test was used in several studies that examined differences in mental ability and intelligence between African Americans and Whites. One study that examined differences between Negroes and Whites on the ACB found that Negroes scored lower than Whites on intelligence (Roen, 1961).

Other studies conducted during the first half of the 20th century investigated differences between African Americans and Whites in personality attributes, traits, and temperaments. Findings from representative studies are reviewed next. The methods used to carry out these studies were influenced by the social and political climate of the time, with most findings reflecting negatively on African Americans. These studies, which almost always found inferior traits among African Americans, contributed to the climate of racism and discrimination against Black people.

A study published in the 1920s is illustrative of the studies of this era. Peterson (1923) tested White and Negro children using several group intelligence tests and individual learning tests. He found significant race differences, with White children scoring higher on both group and individual tests. He noted in his findings that the White 8-year-old children scored higher than the Negro 10-year-old children. Peterson pointed out that these differences were especially salient because of the fact that 60% of the White 8-year-old children came from poor sections of the city, whereas 97% of the 10-year-old Negro children came from one of the best Negro schools in the city. He reported that about 83% of the Whites were smarter than the Negroes, and that only 15% to 18% of the Negroes were as smart as the Whites. According to Peterson, the differences between the two groups were most striking in terms of tasks that required abstract and logical thinking. In making recommendations stemming from his findings, he suggested that there be less abstract and conventional types of education for Negro children. Peterson did not mention that even though the Negro children may have attended one of the best Negro schools in town, these schools had substantially fewer resources than the poor White schools. In

addition, access to community resources beyond the school might have been more available to White than Negro children.

Findings of inferior functioning among African Americans were also seen in early studies on personality traits. Roen (1961) found that Negroes in his study lacked self-confidence more than Whites. Furthermore, low self-confidence among Negroes was associated with lower intelligence test scores. Roen speculated that the lack of pride in historical achievement and a negative socioenvironmental context led to internalized, intellectually defeating personality traits that contributed to lower intelligence scores.

Many studies found that African Americans had elevated scores for problem behaviors. For example, Hokanson and Calden (1960) found that even when Negroes and Whites both came from predominantly Northern working-class settings, Negroes had higher personality deficits in several areas of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI). The authors suggested that special norms be developed for Negro and White subjects. Regarding general adaptation to society, studies found that White and Negro adolescents of similar mental ability differed in personal and social adjustment (Pierce-Jones et al., 1964).

In a review of psychological studies published between 1943 and 1958, Dreger and Miller (1960) found that Whites were superior to Negroes on several attributes, including psychophysical, psychomotor, intelligence, and temperament traits (i.e., neuroticism). They noted that differences between Negroes and Whites were smaller among young children. The authors did not find any superior performance among African Americans in these studies.

Given the findings from psychological studies, it is no wonder there was an assumption of Black racial inferiority during most of the 20th century. These studies were conducted by researchers at prestigious universities who were authoritative and had “scientific” credibility for their work (Guthrie, 1976/1998).

Despite the reports of inferior psychological attributes found in most psychology publications, some scholars, as early as the 1940s, were questioning the racial bias of psychological tests, especially intelligence tests. In commenting on why test items that differentiate between Blacks and Whites should be replaced, Pastore (1946) pointed out that test items that differentiate between boys and girls are eliminated because they are unfair. However, intelligence testing has not eliminated items that differentiate between Whites and Blacks. He concluded that this leads to no differences being seen between boys and girls but differences being seen between Negroes and Whites. Such item selection procedures in this early work systematically support the finding of differences between racial groups and are based on values and other attitudinal assumptions regarding race and intelligence.

A large amount of research on African Americans published during the first half of the 20th century was concerned with whether the results of differences between Blacks and Whites were due to genetic inferiority or the environment. Studies were cited to provide evidence for both positions. Those who made the argument that the environment was the cause of inferior performance among African Americans presented evidence that African Americans could learn when provided an opportunity to do so. Witty (1945) argued that the scores for the Army General Classification test, a test of intelligence, were associated with educational opportunities for soldiers within their local communities. To support this argument, Witty provided evidence that Negroes improved in performance when given the opportunity. In a special training unit, illiterate people were given an eight-week course to develop fourth-grade skills. The essential skills were attained by 87% of the Negroes and 84% of the Whites. He concluded that these findings showed evidence that Negroes are equal to Whites in the ability to learn.

In accounting for environmental influences on low Negro self-concept, Grambs (1965) wrote,

It does not take much imagination to understand what generations of being told one is unworthy will do to a group's validation of its worth. ... The self-esteem of the Negro is damaged by the overwhelming fact that the world he lives in says, "White is right; black is bad." The impact on the Negro community is to over-value all those traits of appearance that are primarily Caucasian. Evidence is clear that in almost every Negro family, the lighter children are favored by the parents. (p. 14)

Much work was devoted to justifying the inferiority of Blacks in American psychology during the first half of the 20th century. However, some began to question this assumption during the second half of the century.

Contemporary Research in African American Psychology

Contemporary writings and research on African American psychology are diverse throughout this book. Some topics have received more attention (e.g., racial identity and racism) than others. The methods used to conduct research are varied and include both quantitative and qualitative studies and studies with college, community, work, and clinical samples. Several studies have included nationally representative samples (e.g., the National Survey of Black Americans) and have examined U.S.-born African Americans and Blacks born in other countries. Notably, more recent studies focus on within-group differences among Black Americans rather than comparison with other racial/ethnic groups. More recent research has also focused on identifying strengths and resiliencies that promote well-being.

Self-Determination

Several critical events provided the impetus for developing the contemporary psychology of African Americans. A pivotal assumption was that African Americans had to define for themselves what constitutes the psychology of African Americans. The emergence of a voice among African American psychologists (albeit few) occurred during the sociopolitical struggles of the 1960s for civil rights and equality. The demand for civil rights was made for all institutions, including educational institutions. Black Nationalism and the Black Power movement were also driving forces for self-determination during the 1960s. These sociopolitical movements set the stage for self-determination among African American Psychologists in the early 20th century.

African American Psychologists in the Early 20th Century

During the first part of the 20th century, a few African Americans were beginning to enter the field of psychology. Despite many obstacles, African Americans became psychologists (Guthrie, 1976/1998). Two significant obstacles for African Americans were the geographical location of graduate programs in psychology and the cost of graduate school. Most graduate-level universities in the South, where the majority of African Americans lived, did not admit African Americans. This meant that African Americans had to go

North to attend graduate school. However, out-of-state tuition was expensive, as were travel costs. This situation, along with the low incomes of most African Americans during this period, made it very difficult for African Americans to go to graduate school, even if graduate schools accepted them.

At this time, most African Americans attended predominantly Black colleges. White universities required African Americans who had received their bachelor's degree from a predominantly Black university to complete an additional year of undergraduate school to demonstrate their ability for graduate school. Thus, there were more extended periods of matriculation for African Americans than Whites (Guthrie, 1976/1998).

Despite these obstacles, a few African Americans obtained a doctoral degree in psychology during the first quarter of the 20th century. Francis C. Sumner was the first Black to receive a PhD in psychology in the United States; he received it in 1920 from Clark University in Massachusetts. Because of this distinction, Sumner is called the "Father of Black Psychology." Sumner conducted his dissertation research on the psychoanalysis of Freud and Adler. He became chair of the Department of Psychology at Howard University in Washington, DC. Howard became a leading university that provided training in psychology to African Americans at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Charles Henry Thompson was another early recipient of the PhD in psychology. He received his PhD in educational psychology from the University of Chicago in 1925. Dr. Thompson conducted his dissertation research on teacher curriculums. In 1933, Inez Beverly Prosser received a PhD in educational psychology from the University of Cincinnati and became the first Black woman to receive a doctorate in psychology. In 1938, Herman Canaday at West Virginia State College convened Black professionals interested in Black psychology and established a Black psychologists committee within the American Teachers Association (ATA). The ATA was the professional organization for Black educators.

The Association of Black Psychologists

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) is the membership organization for people interested in Black psychology. ABPsi is now over 55 years old and was organized in 1968 when African American psychologists attending the predominantly White American Psychological Association (APA) conference reacted to what they felt were nonsupportive, if not racist, positions regarding ethnic minority concerns. A group of African American psychologists met during the 1968 APA meeting in San Francisco and generated a list of demands (Williams, 2008). The reactionary position of African American psychologists at this meeting was consistent with the self-determination and protest ideology of the 1960s. African American psychologists were tired of being ignored and were fed up with research, policies, and programs that were discriminatory to African Americans.

The demands that African American psychologists made included the following:

1. The APA must integrate its workforce with more African Americans.
2. The APA should work to gain the admittance of more African Americans in psychology graduate schools.
3. Racist content found in APA journals should be eliminated.
4. The APA should establish programs so that concerns specific to each minority group can be addressed.

Following the 1968 meeting, African American psychologists in attendance decided to form their own organization rather than try to effect change within the APA. Robert Williams, one of the founding fathers of ABPsi, chronicled the organization's history in a book published on the *History of the Association of Black Psychologists* (Williams, 2008). The thrust of ABPsi today remains similar to that articulated 55 years ago. See <http://www.abpsi.org> for more information on ABPsi.

ABPsi's mission is to liberate and empower people of African descent and illuminate the African Spirit." (Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), n.d.). ABPsi works to promote and advance African psychology, influence social change, and develop programs in which Black psychologists can assist in solving problems of Black communities and other ethnic groups (ABPsi, n.d.).

Some of the agendas of the ABPsi today are as follows: One, to provide training and support to Black psychology students. The ABPsi encourages and promotes the professional development of Black undergraduate and graduate students through scholarships, student support in research activities, and publications directed at assisting students in graduate education. The student committee (known as the Student Circle) of ABPsi provides support and a forum in which students can address important topics facing them, the universities they attend, and the communities in which they live. The Student Circle of ABPsi has been especially beneficial to students who attend predominantly White universities, as it introduces them to African American psychologists.

Two, ABPsi has been engaged in strong advocacy against racist and discriminatory practices within the discipline of psychology, as well as in other areas. The ABPsi has emphasized the need for culturally affirming practices, treatment, and services. As early as 1969, the year after the formation of ABPsi, African American psychologists were arguing against the use of culturally biased tests. Robert Williams, then president of ABPsi, asked for an end to using tests that were not standardized on Black Americans, arguing that they were not valid. To illustrate what he perceived as cultural bias in testing, Williams developed a test labeled the "Bitch" test: the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity. Williams showed that when the Bitch test was administered to White samples, they fared poorly in comparison with African Americans. The discriminatory nature of testing, as it affects African Americans, continues to be one of the major issues addressed by ABPsi.

Three, ABPsi has developed several programs that support the mental health of Black people (Association of Black Psychologists, n.d.). The Sawubona Healing Circles is one. Sawubona is a Zulu word that means "I see you" or "We see you." The Sawubona Healing Circles use culturally grounded techniques and healing strategies to support people of African ancestry in dealing with racial stress and trauma. These circles provide a safe and affirming space to encourage emotional well-being among participants.

ABPsi has several other resources for individuals needing mental health support. These include a Black Resource Directory with the names of Black wellness professionals and experts in certain topics, a toolkit on addressing the causes of anti-Black racism, and a career center that provides information about career opportunities, including employment postings.

Four, ABPsi has been active in addressing social, psychological, and health problems found among people of African descent through training, education, and programs at the local, state, and national levels. Training in topics related to mental health, substance abuse, inequity in the criminal justice system, HIV, COVID-19, and children and families are offered by local chapters, at the national convention, and by members throughout the country. ABPsi and its members provide health screenings, mental health assessments, expert testimony, consultation with agencies, and other activities.

Five, ABPsi has promoted an awareness of the problems and concerns facing Blacks throughout the Diaspora. A related mission is to increase connections and collaborations among Black people worldwide. For example, ABPsi has publicized racial apartheid in South Africa, tribal conflict, and famine in African countries. Annual national conferences of the ABPsi include attendance by Black people throughout the African Diaspora, as well as collaborative international activities with countries in the Caribbean, Africa, and South America. Two ABPsi annual conferences have been international, one held in Jamaica and another in Ghana.

Toward a Black Psychology

A seminal message that contributed to the recognition of the field of Black psychology was articulated by Joseph White (1970) in an *Ebony* magazine article titled *Toward a Black Psychology*. (An update of this paper appeared as a chapter in the fourth edition of Reginald Jones's book *Black Psychology* [2004].) In this paper, Dr. White, a professor at the University of California, Irvine, explained how it was difficult, if not impossible, to understand the psychology of Black people using theories that White psychologists developed to examine White people (Guthrie, 1976/1998). In this article, White strongly advocated a Black psychology defined by Blacks. He challenged White positions on Black psychology and empowered non-White racial and ethnic groups to speak their unique cultural truths (Cokley et al., 2019).

Dr. White's paper received much attention from the public, not surprising given the time period of the early 1970s. Some felt that Joseph White's position was polarizing for African Americans. Others felt that this position dichotomized psychology into Black and White disciplines. Still others felt that a psychology formulated from the experiences of Blacks would marginalize Black psychology. The perspective that Black psychology was in some way different from White psychology was perceived by some as creating a lower-class psychology for Blacks. Others felt just as strongly as Professor White that it was time for Black psychology to be formulated from the authentic experiences of Blacks. Over the next several years, several books (including this one) on Black psychology or African American psychology were written.

The Journal of Black Psychology

The *Journal of Black Psychology* is the official journal of the ABPsi. It is the leading journal for research and theory on the behaviors and experiences of Black and African-centered perspectives. The journal began in 1974, six years after the formation of the ABPsi, and has grown from publishing issues twice a year to four times per year. The *Journal of Black Psychology* publishes contributions within the field of psychology that are directed toward the understanding of the experiences and behavior of Black populations. The major disciplines of psychology are represented in the journal, including clinical, counseling, social, educational, organizational, and cognitive psychology. Journal articles are empirical but include theoretical reviews, commentaries, case studies, and book reviews. In addition, special issues that focus on specific topics are published periodically. Some of these have included Black youth suicide, sickle cell disease, racial identity, African American children, African American girls, HIV prevention, substance abuse prevention, and health disparities. The authors relied extensively on the *Journal of Black Psychology* to gather research and literature for this book.

Studies of African Americans in Other Journals

Many other journals publish research on African Americans and Africans. This includes journals whose focus is on Blacks or African Americans (e.g., *Journal of Black Studies*), journals with an ethnic minority focus (e.g., *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority*

Psychology), and journals that are not explicitly targeted to African Americans but have papers with a Black focus (e.g., *Journal of Counseling Psychology*). Some journals published in Africa are discussed in Chapter 2. The increase in publications about the experiences of Black people has been due to the increase in African American psychologists and an increasing awareness of cultural diversity. Publications have expanded the knowledge of African Americans and informed the psychological community on culturally congruent approaches to studying African Americans. Recent writings have also focused on understanding African American behaviors from a positive, culturally appropriate framework rather than a negative, culturally deviant framework.

Influential African American Psychologists

Several African American psychologists have influenced the field of African American psychology. Next, we highlight individuals who have made significant contributions. We selected these individuals based on several considerations: (a) These individuals were the first African Americans to obtain a doctorate in psychology or the first in other accomplishments, (b) they developed new theories and conceptual frameworks, and (c) their research has impacted social policy and improved conditions for African Americans. Some have been influential because they have advanced theories that have been a catalyst for others who have followed them; others have had a large impact because of how prolific they were. Some are listed because they have influenced our teachings and writings directly and indirectly.

Francis C. Sumner

Sumner, the first African American to receive a PhD in psychology in the United States (in 1920), is regarded as the “Father of Black Psychology” (Guthrie, 1976/1998). This accomplishment is noteworthy because when he received his degree, only 11 Blacks out of a total of 10,000 recipients earned a PhD between 1876 and 1920 in the United States. Working against many barriers, Francis Sumner earned his degree at Clark University in Massachusetts. At the age of 15, he enrolled as a freshman at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania after passing an examination instead of a high school diploma. He enrolled in Clark College in 1915 and received an English degree. Sumner joined the faculty at Howard University, Washington, DC, in 1928 and was chair of the Department of Psychology from 1928 to 1954. During this period, he established strong graduate and undergraduate programs in psychology. Under his leadership, the department produced many influential Black psychologists and provided training, especially at the bachelor’s and master’s levels. Mamie Clark and Kenneth Clark, two other influential African American psychologists, received training at Howard University.

Inez Beverly Prosser

Inez Beverly Prosser, born in 1895, was the first African American woman to receive her PhD in psychology. She obtained a doctorate in educational psychology in 1933 from the University of Cincinnati. Her dissertation, which received much recognition, was titled *The Non-Academic Development of Negro Children in Mixed and Segregated Schools*. It was one of the earliest studies that examined personality differences in Black children attending either voluntarily segregated or integrated schools. Dr. Prosser concluded that Black children were better served in segregated schools. This research was one of several studies in the 1920s and 1930s that was part of the debate on segregated schools as maintained

in the United States under the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* concerning school environments of African American children (Warren, 1999). Inez Prosser is included because her achievement is notable and inspiring, considering the immense barriers for women and Black Americans in education during her era. Dr. Prosser served in teaching and administrative positions at Tillotson College in Austin, Texas, and Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. Her influence would have been even greater had she not been killed in a tragic accident in 1934 at the age of 39.

Mamie Clark and Kenneth Clark

This husband-and-wife team is best known for their work on racial preferences among Black children. Their classic doll studies were published in the 1930s and early 1940s (Clark & Clark, 1939, 1947). In these studies, Black children were shown Black and White dolls and told to choose the one that looked like them, the one they preferred, the one that was a good doll, and the one that was a bad doll. The Clarks concluded from their findings that Black children preferred White dolls. This classic study led the Clarks to argue that Black children who attended segregated schools had low self-esteem. The findings were used in arguments against racial segregation, the most famous of which was the 1954 landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education*. Prior to this, Blacks had received inferior education in segregated schools. The *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark decision ruled that separate but equal education was unconstitutional. That is, schools could not be separate and equal simultaneously. Although there were several subsequent methodological criticisms of the Clark and Clark doll studies, they continue to be classic studies of racial identity and preferences. Kenneth Clark was the first African American to be president of the APA.

William E. Cross

William Cross's model of the development of racial and ethnic identity has generated considerable work over the past four decades and continues to do so today. Cross's model was labeled a nigrescence model. (*Nigrescence*, a word with Latin roots, means to become Black.) Nigrescence models accounted for the progression of African Americans through sequential stages to arrive at a mature racial identity (Cross, 1978, 1991). These stages were subsequently labeled as pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization commitment. Specific affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions characterize each stage. Racial identity theory is discussed more extensively in Chapter 3. Cross's model has been revised and augmented by several other scholars, including Janet Helms (also included as an influential psychologist) and Thomas Parham. Dr. Cross is also known for his book, *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (Cross, 1991). His model provided a framework for other models of identity development (e.g., Native American identity, women's identity, gay-lesbian identity, Asian identity). Prior to his death in 2024, Dr. Cross was professor emeritus at the City University of New York. He also spent many years on faculty at Cornell University and Penn State University.

Reginald L. Jones

Reginald Jones is considered an influential psychologist because of the large amount of work he published on African American/Black psychology. Jones published more than 20 books on African American psychology and related topics, and his books provided comprehensive coverage of Black psychology. Many of his works are edited volumes

that include a variety of authors, perspectives, and topics. His book on Black psychology was the first comprehensive book to be published. The first edition of *Black Psychology* was published in 1972, and the fourth edition was published in 2004. *Black Psychology* includes chapters on several topics, including African philosophy, personality, assessment, intelligence assessment, counseling, racism, racial identity, cognition, and language. We frequently consulted all editions of Jones's *Black Psychology* while writing this book.

Some of the other books on African American psychology that R. Jones edited include *African American Identity Development* (1998b); *Advances in African American Psychology* (1999); *African American Children, Youth, and Parenting* (1998a); *African American Mental Health* (1998c); *Black Adolescents* (1989); and *Handbook of Tests and Measurement for Black Populations* (1996). The books authored and edited by Dr. Jones were used in African American psychology classes and similar courses throughout the country. Dr. Jones died in 2005 while a professor emeritus at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia.

James M. Jones

James Jones is considered an influential African American psychologist for two reasons. First, his book *Prejudice and Racism*, published in 1972 and revised in 1997, is a classic examination of prejudice and racism. In this book, Jones analyzes the different types of racism—individual, institutional, and cultural. Another of his book's on the topic is *The Psychology of Diversity: Beyond Prejudice and Racism* (with Jack Dovidio and Deborah Vietze) (Jones et al., 2013).

Second, Dr. Jones substantially impacted African American psychology as the director of the APA's Minority Fellowship Program for over 30 years. In this position, Dr. Jones was responsible for managing a program to increase the number of Black and other ethnic minority scholars who obtained doctorates in psychology. The mission of the minority fellowship program is to improve the quality of mental health treatment and research on issues of concern among ethnic minority populations in psychology by offering financial support, guidance, and training in becoming a psychologist. More than 2,000 graduate students of color have benefitted from this program. The minority fellowship program began in 1974 with Dalmas Taylor as the first director. James Jones became director in 1977 and directed the program for many years. Dr. Jones is distinguished professor emeritus of psychological and brain sciences professor and director of the Center for the Study of Diversity at the University of Delaware.

Janet E. Helms

Janet Helms is an influential African American psychologist because of her vast contributions to multiracial counseling, race relations, and racial identity theory and development. Dr. Helms has written prolifically on race, racial identity, and multicultural counseling. She developed the Racial Attitude Identity Scale (RAIS), one of psychology's most widely used measures. Her book, *Black and White Racial Identity: Theory, Research, and Practice*, published in 1990, was one of the first published books on racial identity and is considered a classic. Other books include *A Race Is a Nice Thing to Have* (Helms, 2008) and *Using Culture in Counseling and Psychotherapy: Theory and Process* (Helms & Cook, 1999).

Dr. Helms was on the University of Maryland College Park faculty for 20 years, where she trained more than 40 doctoral students who have become influential psychologists in their own right. In 2000, Teachers College, Columbia University, established an award in

her name, the Janet E. Helms Award, in recognition of her mentoring. In 2000, she joined the faculty at Boston College and founded the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture. She is now emeritus professor in the Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology. She continues to write and publish on topics in counseling psychology, including racial identity.

Margaret Beale Spencer

Margaret Beale Spencer played a significant role in supporting our understanding of the development of African American children and adolescents. Dr. Spencer graduated from the University of Chicago's Child and Developmental Psychology Program, where her studies included replicating the Clark and Clark doll studies. This work further clarified our understanding that children as young as three years of age are influenced by and have an awareness of societal racial bias but that early in development, knowledge of these societal attitudes is unrelated to African American children's sense of self.

Dr. Spencer is known for the Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST), which uses a strength and resiliency framework to understand African American youth. Her work largely focuses on identity, resiliency, and adaptive development within challenging developmental contexts. This has included work measuring the influence of neighborhood factors on the development of African American adolescents, as well as examining how the social ecology of African American youth plays a role in their construction of meaning and their developmental outcomes (see discussion of PVEST, phenomenology, and ecological systems theory in Chapter 11). Her recent work focuses on using incentive programs for low- and high-achieving high school students and the role of skin tone in self-perception. Dr. Spencer is the Marshall Field IV Professor of Urban Education at the University of Chicago. Before this, she was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education.

Claude M. Steele

Claude Steele is best known for his work on stereotype threat and how it affects performance among minority groups, beginning with his classic study on stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat occurs when a person believes that they are at risk of confirming a negative stereotype of their social group. The anxiety arising from stereotype threat can undermine the performance of a task that may be viewed as nondescriptive of one's group. This classic study showed that Black students underperformed on an achievement test when their race was made salient. When race was not salient, there was no difference in the performance of Black and White students. This study has been replicated with other cultural groups (e.g., women, Latines, Asians, older adults) and stereotypes (e.g., math achievement, cognitive ability) (Liu et al., 2021; Mariano et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 1999). Dr. Steele has also conducted research on self-affirmation and self-image and the role of self-regulation in addictive behaviors. His book, *Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us* summarizes research on stereotype threat and the underperformance of minority students in higher education (Steele, 2011). Dr. Steele has contributed to public awareness of how stereotype threat undermines performance through TED Talks, engagement on podcasts, and other public presentations.

Dr. Steele is a professor emeritus of psychology at Stanford University. He has held several leadership positions, including executive vice chancellor and provost for the

University of California, Berkeley, dean of the School of Education at Stanford, and provost of Columbia University.

African-Centered Psychologists

In the 1970s, several African American psychologists began writing and educating people about the importance of understanding African philosophy as a basis for understanding African American psychology. These include Na'im Akbar, Asa Hilliard, Wade Nobles, Joseph Baldwin (Kobi Kamfon), Daudi Azibo, Fred Phillips, Amos Wilson, Linda James Myers, Cheryl Grills, and Shawn Utsey. The work of these psychologists is often published in the *Journal of Black Psychology*. Chapters were also published in Reginald Jones's edited book *Black Psychology* (1972, 2004) and Neville and colleagues' (2008) edited book *Handbook of African American Psychology*. Several of these psychologists are highlighted in Chapter 2.

African Americans' Presence Within the American Psychological Association

The APA is a membership organization with more than 157,000 members. Its mission is to advance the creation, communication, and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives (APA, 2022a). Divisions within APA are geared to the disciplines and interests of APA members.

Several components of APA represent the professional interests of African American psychologists. APA's Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, encourages research on ethnic minority issues and the application of psychological knowledge to address issues of ethnic minority populations. One distinction between APA's Division 45 and the ABPsi is that APA's Division 45 supports all ethnic minority groups while ABPsi is more specifically focused on Black issues. The official journal of Division 45 is *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*. Black scholarship is frequently published in this journal.

The APA's Ethnicity, Race, and Cultural Affairs Office seeks to increase the scientific understanding of how culture pertains to psychology and how ethnicity influences behavior. It also focuses on promotion, recruitment, retention, and training opportunities for ethnic minority psychologists, increasing the delivery of appropriate psychological services to ethnic minority communities and promoting better inclusion of ethnic minorities in organized psychology (APA, 2021b).

In overview, the American Psychological Association has several programs and initiatives relevant to Black psychologists and the mental health of people of African heritage.

Status of African American Psychology Today

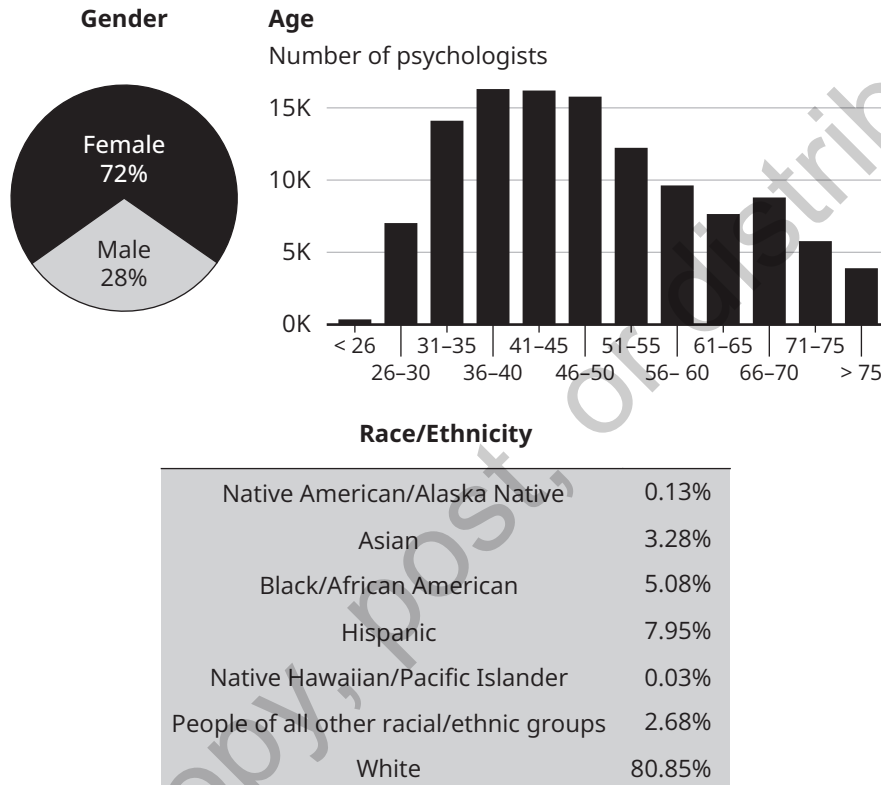
Teaching African American Psychology

Today, African American psychology is taught at many colleges and universities. The course is often cross-listed with African American studies. Increased interest in African American psychology is attributed to several factors. These include the growing appreciation for cultural diversity, increased enrollment of Black students, recognition of the contributions of African American psychology to general psychology, and increases in the number of faculty who can teach this course.

African American Psychologists

African Americans and other racial- or ethnic-minority groups are not represented in the active psychology workforce as shown in Figure 1.1 (APA, 2022b). The active psychology workforce is defined as psychologists with doctoral or professional degrees.

Figure 1.1 ■ Demographics of the U.S. Psychology Workforce



Note: Data for this table were based on five-year estimates.

Percentages were calculated according to guidance provided by U.S. Census based on replicate weights.

Racial/ethnic categories may mask the heterogeneity within each category. For example, for people with two or more races, the sample size was too small to draw meaningful inferences and was therefore collapsed into a broader category (people of all other racial/ethnic groups).

Source: American Psychological Association. (2022b). Demographics of the U.S. Psychology Workforce.

However, racial/ethnic minority representation in psychology is increasing. The National Science Survey of Earned Doctorates provides information on the number of Black/African Americans and other racial/ethnic minority groups earning doctorates in psychology among U.S. citizens and permanent residents (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2023). In 2023, among those earning doctorate degrees in psychology, 288 (8.8%) were non-Hispanic Black/African Americans, an increase from 4% about 20 years ago. Other percentages are Hispanic/Latine (12%); Not Hispanic:

Native American/Alaska Native (< 1%); Asian (7.4%), White (62.3%), More than one race (4.3%); and Other race (1.2%). Ethnicity not reported was 2.2%.

A large gender disparity exists among Black psychologists, and this disparity is greater than for other racial or ethnic groups. Among Black active psychologists, 83% are female, 17% are male, and other genders are not identified.

These statistics highlight the need for more Black male psychologists. One reason for this disparity is that men do not pursue graduate studies in psychology at the same rate as women. African American men are also less likely than women to obtain a bachelor's degree, a prerequisite for enrolling in a doctoral program (Turner & Turner, 2015). In overview, the percentage of Black psychologists is not representative but is growing and has doubled in the past 20 years.

African American Faculty and Graduate Students in Graduate Departments of Psychology

African American Faculty

The presence of Black faculty in psychology departments, specifically graduate departments, is important. Graduate departments provide training at the doctoral level. Black faculty are important insofar as they generally tend to encourage research on issues of concern to Black/African Americans, assist in recruiting and retaining Black students, and teach classes and integrate material on the experiences of Black people in the curriculum of courses taught. An APA Task Force report on promotion, tenure, and retention of faculty of color provides data on race/ethnicity within psychology departments. As of fall 2021, about 25% of tenure-track faculty across faculty rank (e.g., assistant, associate, and full professor) identified as faculty of color. The report pointed out two barriers for faculty of color: (1) the small number of people of color entering faculty positions and (2) the decision among people of color to leave academia at different points in their careers. The percentage of African American/Black assistant professors is 5.8%. The percentage of associate professors who are African American/Black is also 5.8%, and the percentage who are full professors is 4.1%. These data reflect a relatively low percentage of African American/Black faculty across different ranks (APA, 2023).

The report cited several reasons why Black and other faculty of color are less likely to progress through faculty ranks from assistant professor to full professor. One, Black/African American faculty scholars who focus on social justice and inclusion in their work may rely on different methodologies (e.g., lived experience, qualitative research) (Goings et al., 2023) and publish in journals that are relevant to their discipline but that may not be considered high-impact and prestigious. Black faculty also carry a heavier burden of visible and invisible labor, including more responsibilities for mentoring and counseling students of color who may be experiencing issues related to their minoritized status. Black/African American faculty also face cultural taxation, defined as “the obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its needs for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may even bring accolades to the institution, but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed” (Padilla, 1994, p. 26). Black faculty and other faculty of color are also more likely to engage in tasks that do not contribute to promotion, such as serving on departmental diversity and inclusion committees and

participating in higher levels of community and civic engagement. In addition to these barriers, African American faculty and other faculty of color are subject to different forms of racism, implicit biases and microaggressions.

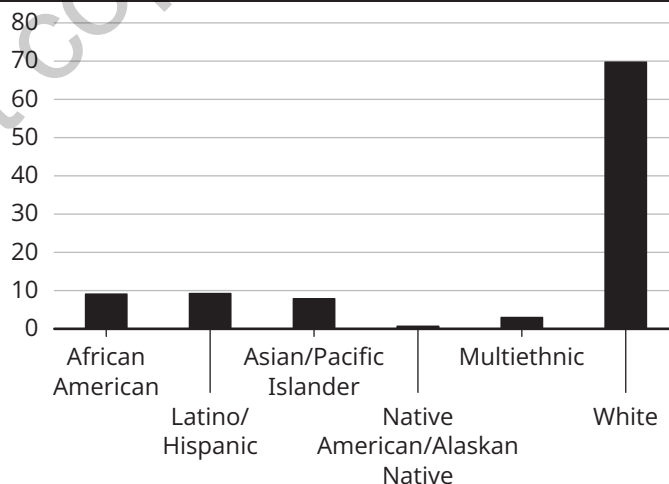
Given these disparities, the Task Force had several recommendations, including creating professional development resources, implementing policies for effective mentorship, eliminating bias in the review process through training, and ensuring that criteria for evaluations are consistent and fair.

African American Graduate Students

Ethnic and racial diversity among graduate students is also important. In addition to being trained as a psychologist, graduate students fulfill many other roles. They are teaching assistants and instructors in courses; they advise and mentor undergraduate students around careers and personal and professional issues; in doctoral programs, they engage and train undergraduate students in conducting research; they work with faculty to conduct research; and they serve as role models for ethnic minority undergraduate students. Many Black graduate students, especially doctoral students, study issues related to African American psychology. Our graduate students have been involved in HIV and substance abuse prevention programs and education in the local community, and have conducted research on eliminating health disparities, cultural attributes (e.g., racial identity, gender roles), and youth well-being.

Similar to faculty, the number of students enrolled in graduate programs is not representative of racial and ethnic group representation in the United States. APA surveyed 520 psychology departments with graduate programs (Cope et al., 2017). Racial and ethnic minorities composed about 30% of the graduate students in psychology, and Black/African Americans composed about 9.1% (see Figure 1.2). Consistent with faculty, more women were enrolled than men; 75% of graduate students were female, and 25% were male.

Figure 1.2 ■ Race/Ethnicity of Graduate (Masters and Doctoral) Students in Psychology



Source: Cope, Michalski, & Fowler. (2017).

One of the barriers to the enrollment of Black students in doctoral psychology programs is the need for mentoring at the undergraduate level in preparation for graduate school. When undergraduate students are not mentored or advised by faculty (or graduate students), they may only realize once it is too late (usually their senior year) what they need to do to gain admission to a doctoral program. Undergraduate students may not be involved in research experiences often required for graduate school. Requirements for a master's program are generally not as competitive.

Once enrolled in doctoral psychology programs, Black/African American students face several barriers, some of which are similar to and some of which differ from those faced by other racial and ethnic groups. Some of the barriers include microaggressions (i.e., everyday exchanges that send demeaning messages to people based on racial or ethnic group membership) (Sue et al., 2007), lack of culturally competent faculty who can mentor Black students, lack of faculty with expertise in topics related to African American psychology, and lack of peers who share values and lifestyle.

Methodological and Research Issues

Some of the methodological issues that were historically problematic in studying African Americans remain, while others have shifted. The best methods for studying African American populations may differ from those for other ethnic groups (Goings et al., 2023). For example, the experimental method is favored in psychology and has been considered the gold standard for conducting research. However, there may be better ways to arrive at an understanding of the psychology of African Americans. Other methods, such as interviewing and observation, may be more appropriate, depending on what is being studied. African psychology (discussed in Chapter 2) considers self-knowledge and intuition as essential sources of knowledge. Self-knowledge is derived from asking people about themselves, not observing them under experimental conditions.

Contemporary Issues

Why Do We Need More African American Faculty?

When we have argued for more Black faculty who represent the student body, the community, and the "subject/participant" population, colleagues, particularly those who are not faculty of color, have reacted with surprise and challenged our assumption that Black faculty and researchers should be representative of the people studied, taught, and with whom one works. This is not to imply that those who are not of African descent cannot do good research, programming, teaching, and clinical work with people of African descent but that people of African descent bring a lived perspective that is likely to inform research, teaching, and other aspects of behavior and interpersonal relationships. Still, others in academia view African American psychology as a subfield of multicultural psychology and argue that attentiveness should be directed toward all diversity and multicultural issues rather than African American psychology specifically. While multiculturalism and attentiveness to diversity are important and indeed increase openness and appreciation for all cultural groups, a basic premise of multiculturalism is to know yourself and those with whom you are working. As the statistics in this chapter point out, the field of

psychology has significantly fewer Black psychologists and do not represent the Black population. There are also significantly fewer Black graduate students than White graduate students studying to become psychologists. This is partially attributable to the low number of Black faculty at graduate training universities in this country. As will be seen throughout this book, Black researchers and teachers bring experiences and perspectives that are meaningful to the training of all students. All students, not just Black students, benefit from a diverse and representative faculty.

Another methodological consideration is the relevance of the constructs that are being examined. A construct may not have the same meaning for Black/African Americans as it does for other ethnic groups. An earlier example we used was how the concept of self-esteem is used. Among those of African descent, the self-concept may include the collective and the individual self. From a Western psychological perspective, the self is individualized. Another construct that may differ across racial groups is family. Who constitutes the African American family, and where are its boundaries? Do we think of only a nuclear, biologically related family or do we include fictive kin? What is effective family functioning? The answers to these questions for African Americans may differ from those for other groups. More research is needed to better understand when constructs are universal and when constructs are culturally specific to African Americans.

Another major concern in many studies, past and present, involves the issue of defining and sampling African Americans. When studies are presented focusing on Black/African Americans, who are the individuals in the sample? Are they college students? Urban children, youth, and their families living in challenged communities? Suburban youth attending integrated schools? Recently migrated children or youth living in segregated communities with variable access to educational resources? First-generation African immigrants? A person's self-identification as Jamaican, Black, African American, or Afro-American also may impact study findings. Understanding, identifying, and describing the experience, history, and context of Blacks and African Americans as a diverse group and considering this variability within our research samples is critically important in strengthening our understanding of the psychology of African Americans. From an African-centered perspective, this also raises questions regarding whether there is a need for pan-African psychology that includes, integrates, and compares work involving participants from the United States, Africa, and other settings relevant to the Diaspora.

The relatively low percentage of Black psychologists contributes to some of these methodological issues. The problems and questions of interest are often identified and studied by those least affected, who may not understand the right questions to ask and the methods to use. Throughout this book, we return to methodological and conceptual issues, pointing out how these issues affect the validity and practicality of studies conducted on African Americans.

Another methodological issue concerns the actual researcher or investigator. We all hold values about what is important to study. The investigator is an independent variable. Acknowledging what these values are is a necessary step in conducting research. For example, our values have focused more on positive attributes of African American psychology, not negative ones. This may be considered a reactionary stance, given that we have seen so much published on negative attributes..

Critical Analysis

We offer our analysis on several perspectives in African American psychology, including where we see the need for more research and writing.

The divergent perspectives on whether African American psychology should be based on African-focused or Western-focused psychology are long-standing; this book will not resolve those perspectives. At the same time, there is much to be gained by generating more theoretical literature and research concerning how both perspectives can continue to inform our understanding of African Americans, including areas where convergence and integration of these perspectives are helpful. Research on positive psychology may provide an area of convergence as this area of research focuses on topics of interest to Western- and African-centered psychology (i.e., prosocial behavior, spirituality, gratitude).

Within African American psychology, a considerable amount of work has been done in the area of identity—ethnic identity, racial identity, and other aspects of the self. We have devoted a chapter in this book to the topic of identity. Several African American psychologists we consider influential (e.g., K. B. Clark, M. K. Clark, W. E. Cross, J. E. Helms) are best known for their work on identity. At the same time, we can also study the identity of the discipline of African American psychology. The same questions that are asked regarding individual identity development can be extended to the identity of African American psychology. What were key milestones in the development of African American psychology? What socioenvironmental and political factors contributed to the development of African American psychology? What are some of the core topics that the discipline is concerned with? What will the discipline look like 20 years from now? We expect these and other questions to be addressed as African American psychology develops and maintains its identity.

Another issue concerns the influence of African American psychology on Western psychology. Just as Western psychology has influenced African American psychology, African American psychology has contributed to Western psychology. A core premise of African American psychology is that consideration must be given to understanding a group of people's values, culture, and ways of being. This is undoubtedly true whether the group differs racially and ethnically by age, disability, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation. African American psychology has insisted on acknowledging the ways of being fundamental to our cultural group. Other groups can also benefit from this perspective.

Although Western psychology is sometimes criticized for its emphasis on universal perspectives and reductionistic strategies that ignore culture and context, it is also important that African American and Africentric psychological perspectives critically consider these factors in their psychological perspective on Black Americans. To what extent and in what ways are other disciplinary perspectives on culture and context, especially history, important, made explicit, and integrated in our work in understanding African Americans? To what extent are interdisciplinary social science perspectives and strategies critical to expanding our knowledge base?

As we will see throughout this book, much of African American psychology has studied differences between Black and White Americans. We report many of these differences in this book. However, we need more research on how African Americans have survived and thrived individually, as groups, and as a people. We need more research on the optimal functioning of individuals, families, and communities. We have highlighted some areas where more research is needed throughout the book.

Summary

The proverb at the top of this chapter suggests that the end will be successful when the beginning is understood. This chapter was written to inform the reader about African American psychology, its origins, historical events, and people. By informing the reader of the history, we hope that the reader will successfully learn about this field of psychology.

The origin of the study of African American psychology can be traced to Kemet. During this period, Black people produced a systematic body of knowledge. European theories, including Darwin's survival of the fittest doctrine and Galton's doctrine of eugenics, contributed to the belief in the inferiority of people of African descent. This belief perpetuated discrimination and racism.

During the first half of the 20th century, the study of African Americans in American psychology was largely comparative, and findings showed African Americans to be inferior to Whites in intelligence, personality, and general adaptation. Obtaining a PhD in psychology was very difficult for Blacks. Francis Sumner obtained his degree in 1920 and is known as the "Father of Black Psychology" because of this achievement. In 1968, a period of self-determination began. The ABPsi was formed by African American psychologists who felt that the predominantly White APA did not address the concerns of Black people. Since then, there has been an increase in culturally appropriate publications within APA and in general. There has also been an increase in the number of Black psychologists and an increase in awareness of cultural diversity in psychology. The APA has offices (e.g., Ethnicity, Race, and Cultural Affairs) and programs targeted at African American professionals and students. More college students are becoming familiar with African American psychology because many colleges and universities teach courses in it.

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Chapter 2

African-Centered Psychology

Wood may remain for ten years in the water, but it will never become a crocodile.

—Zarian proverb

Learning Objectives

- To define and understand African-centered psychology
- To understand the origins of African psychology
- To understand worldview dimensions found among people of African descent
- To appreciate the contributions of African-centered psychologists
- To become familiar with research in African-centered psychology
- To identify methodological issues when conducting African-centered research
- To become familiar with best practices that use an African-centered approach

On the Need for Eurocentric Anonymous: An Assessment of the July 2000 Keynote Address

By Halford Fairchild

On July 31, 2000, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard provided the keynote address to the Annual International Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists in Accra, Ghana. At one point in the address, he suggested that Africans need a 12-Step Program to solve our addiction to Eurocentric thinking. We need a “Eurocentric Anonymous.”

Hilliard magnificently encapsulated the mission of Black psychologists: to rescue and reclaim the African mind. His historically contextualized address relied on novelist Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons*, which suggested that the struggles of African people—throughout the world—have stretched through the millennia.

Hilliard makes no distinction between continental Africans and those throughout the Diaspora: We are one people—united in our history, in our struggles, and in our (eventual) liberation. Africans have been at war with invaders who sought to invalidate their humanity. Africans have endured many forms of genocide—physical onslaughts (murder, captivity, enslavement), and the destruction of culture. The

cultural genocide robbed Africans of their names, religions, and memories. Because of Divide and Conquer, Africans learned to hate each other and themselves.

And yet, despite the odds, Africans have survived. Hilliard celebrated the return of Africans from America through the “Door of (No) Return.” But the emphasis on overcoming historical oppression isn’t about the past, it is about the future.

The Sankofa symbol—a bird with its head turned toward the rear, with an egg in its beak—has future generations in mind. To acknowledge the tens of thousands of years of African development is to reclaim the past in order to chart a future course. As Marcus Garvey said, “Up you mighty race! What you have done before, you can do again!”

Hilliard illustrated that the liberation psychology literature already exists—in the works of Akbar, Nobles, Ani, Wright, Kambon, Arme, Garvey, Woodson—it is up to us to read it. We must study the success stories of African liberation: the Haitian revolution (and Toussaint L’Overture), Marcus Garvey (and the United Negro Improvement Association), Steve Biko (and the ANC [African National Congress]), Septima Clark (and literacy training), and others.

As Biko said, “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.” What we need, Hilliard intones, is to break the chains of conceptual incarceration. We need “Eurocentric Anonymous.”

Source: Fairchild (2011). Used with permission of Psych Discourse.

Introduction to African-Centered Psychology and the Africentric Worldview

The news story that opens this chapter provides an assessment by Dr. Halford Fairchild of how Dr. Asa Hilliard, a prominent African-centered psychologist, encouraged Black psychologists to reclaim their African identity by ridding themselves of Eurocentric thinking. The focus of African-centered psychology is on African values and ways of thinking and behaving indigenous to Blacks throughout the Diaspora. In this chapter, we discuss the influence of African culture and the Africentric worldview on the psychology of African Americans. The terms *African-centered*, *Africentric*, *African*, and *Black* psychology are used interchangeably in this chapter according to the usage by scholars cited. Likewise, the terms *Africentric* and *Afrocentric* are used interchangeably, following the spelling used by the scholar cited. In this chapter, we begin with a definition of African psychology followed by a discussion of *worldview*, including the Africentric worldview and its origins. We then describe the contributions of several African-centered psychologists. Africentric worldview dimensions are discussed next, and the question of whether an Africentric worldview can exist among contemporary African Americans is addressed. In the section on African-centered research, we discuss studies which examine the relationship between Africentric values and other variables. Methodological and research issues are discussed, including review of some African-centered measures and discussing best practices for increasing African-centered values. In our critical analysis, we then raise issues relevant to African-centered perspectives and contributions. The chapter concludes with a summary.

What Is African Psychology?

Grills (2004) conceptualized African psychology as psychological experiences from an African perspective. According to Grills, African psychology consists of African values,

ways of accessing knowledge, defining reality, governing and interpreting behavior, social relations, and designing environments to sustain healthy, adaptive functioning among people of African descent. African psychology is rooted in African culture and based on philosophical assumptions indigenous to African-descent people (Utsey et al., 2009). Other scholars emphasize the empowering aspects of African-centered psychology. According to Obasi & Smith (2009), African-centered psychology is a discipline whose purpose is to address the mental health needs of people of African descent from a self-empowering perspective. Although these conceptualizations reflect some variation, the underlying and primary consensus reflected in these ideas is that African culture undergirds the behavior of people of African descent. African American psychology, in contrast, has been traditionally limited to understanding Blacks' values, beliefs, and behavior in the United States. This book encompasses both African-centered and African American psychology.

What Is a Worldview?

A *worldview* is a way of thinking that organizes all aspects of one's life, including intra- and interpersonal thoughts and behaviors and one's functioning in social systems and institutions in the community (e.g., family, school, job, religious institutions) and the larger society. Intrapersonal thoughts refer to one's attitudes, beliefs, values, and expectations. Interpersonal behaviors refer to one's interactions with others. Worldviews provide us with guidelines for living: They affect our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, inferences, behaviors, and how we experience the external world. Simply put, a worldview provides a framework for interpreting events and understanding the world.

An Africentric worldview has its base and foundation in the worldview of African peoples. It consists of the values, beliefs, and behavior of the indigenous people of Africa and those in the Diaspora (e.g., United States, Caribbean, Afro-Latines) who share this cultural heritage. According to Asante (2000), the Afrocentric worldview is characterized by five dimensions: (a) an interest in how symbols, patterns, and rituals can reveal psychological location; (b) a dedication to locating Africans as the subject-place of social, political, economic, or religious occurrence that has consequences for sex, gender, and class issues; (c) support of the historical validity of African cultural aspects in literature, music, and art; (d) celebration of centeredness and agency and a commitment to linguistic refinement that eliminates disparaging terms for Africans or other people; and (e) a solid push to modify the collective narrative of African people.

Sodi et al. (2021) uses the concept of "bothos" to describe an African worldview. The bothos worldview is a positive expression of African humanity and is captured by qualities such as humaneness, compassion, and empathy; these attributes emphasize the essence of being a human person and overlap with other conceptualizations of the African worldview, including African spirituality, personhood, interconnectedness, and communalism.

The Africentric worldview has been contrasted with a Eurocentric worldview whose foundation is based on European culture. African cultures differ from European and Western cultures, and these differences are not only in observable behaviors, norms, and values but also at the deeper level of underlying basic assumptions (Oppong, 2022). The Africentric worldview differs from a Eurocentric worldview along several dimensions, including spirituality, interdependence and collectiveness, time orientation, death and immortality, and kinship (Akbar, 1991a; Nobles, 1991, 2015; Oppong, 2022). These dimensions will be discussed later in the chapter. The Eurocentric worldview generally provides a cultural template for people of European descent, whereas the Africentric worldview provides a cultural template for people of African descent. Worldviews are not limited to people of African and

European descent but exist among all ethnic and cultural groups. It is important to note variations across Africentric and other worldviews. Individuals may function along a continuum, with some people of African descent holding some Eurocentric worldview beliefs and those of European descent holding some Africentric worldviews beliefs (Mkhize, 2021). However, from an African-centered perspective, it is expected that Africentric worldview dimensions will be found, to some degree, among most people of African descent.

Beginnings and Current State of African-Centered Psychology

African-centered psychology in the United States is relatively recent as a topic and perspective. Most literature on African-centered psychology has been published within the past 60 years. However, the study of African psychology as an organized and systematic study of African people has existed since Kemet (3400–600 BCE) (Azibo, 1996). Similarly, according to Oppong (2022), Black people have had ways of understanding themselves prior to scientific psychology as understood in the Western orientation. Several African American psychologists and African scholars have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Africentric worldview.

During the 1970s, Black psychologists began to write about African-centered psychology and the Africentric worldview and how it could be used to understand the psychology of African Americans (Azibo, 1983; Nobles, 1976, 1986; White, 1972, 1984). These early writings coincided with other historical events, such as the civil rights and Black Power movements. Much of this early work focused on articulating the Africentric worldview and how it differed from the Eurocentric worldview.

Over the past 60 years, considerable theoretical and empirical work has been directed at better understanding the Africentric worldview. African American scholars from various academic disciplines have contributed along with African scholars. Much of the work produced by African American psychologists has been published in the *Journal of Black Psychology*, the official journal of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi). Other sources of information on African-centered and Africentric psychology include journals such as the *Western Journal of Black Studies* and the *Journal of Black Studies*. African scholars have published in journals such as *The South African Journal of Psychology* and *The International Journal of Psychology*. Several books have also been written. A notable work is Molefi Asante's classic book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, first published in 1980 and updated in 2003. Asante's book, *An Afrocentric Pan-Africanist Vision: Afrocentric Essays* (2020), provides a more current conceptualization of Afrocentricism. Azibo's (1996) *African Psychology in Historical Perspective and Related Commentary* was an earlier addition to the understanding of Africentric psychology. Kobi Kamfon's book *African-Black Psychology in the American Context: An African-Centered Approach* (1998) also contributed to African-centered psychology. South African scholar Augustine Nwoye's (2022) book, *African Psychology: The Emergence of a Tradition*, focuses on African Psychology as a postcolonial discipline. Representative African-centered research will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) was pivotal in the proliferation of African-centered psychology (Grills et al., 2018). ABPsi's mission is to liberate and empower African people and illuminate the African Spirit (Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi, n.d.). ABPsi has implemented practices that advance the profession of African psychology, influenced social change, and developed programs whereby Black psychologists assist in solving problems of Black communities and other ethnic groups.

African scholars have also produced discourse on African psychology over the past few decades (Mkhize, 2021; Oppong, 2022). “African Psychology can be taken to refer to the systematic and informed study of the complexities of human mental existence, culture, and experience in the pre-and postcolonial African globe” is how Nwoye (2014) describes African psychology (p. 57). Ratele et al. (2018) focus on the humanizing aspect of African-centered psychology. Accordingly, African-centered psychology seeks to give voice to all humans, especially those whose voices have been dismissed. This includes Africans in the context of Western- or Euro-American-dominated psychology and Black people in the context of White-centric psychology. By centering Africa and Africans in psychology, one can meaningfully consider how interlocking systems of oppression, including gendered and racial oppression, constitute histories and contemporary realities.

Other African scholars have focused on the decolonizing aspect of African-centered psychology. These scholars believe that African-centered psychology has to be engaged in combating colonization, which has influenced the individual and economic, political, and social systems (Ratele et al., 2018). From this perspective, African psychology is concerned with the economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental problems confronting African people (Malherbe & Ratele, 2022).

Although African-centered psychology has borrowed heavily from African traditions and culture, psychology on the continent of Africa has encountered challenges similar to those faced by African American psychology in this country (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Mpofu, 2002). Mpofu (2002), in an article titled, “Psychology in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, Prospects, and Promises,” discusses several issues relevant to psychology in Africa. Mpofu notes that most of the mainstream theories in Africa are Western and represent a minority worldview based on a heritage that does not contain the worldviews of the majority of the population. He identifies several challenges psychologists in Africa have with adopting a Western worldview. One limitation is that these mainstream theories are individualistic for the most part and do not reflect the psychological well-being of an African who would include the family and community.

Serpell et al. (2022) organized a collection of papers that illuminated how to include African perspectives in psychology. *African Cultural Models in Psychology* is comprised of papers that show how African people exist within, experience, make sense of, interact with, and shape the world. For example, a paper by Oppong (2020) reviews models of cognitive abilities with African samples. Oppong’s review shows that general intelligence within the African context comprises elements such as cognitive competence, wisdom, and socio-emotional competence—these elements of intelligence differ from those articulated in the Western context.

Nobles (2015) advocates for a Black psychology among African descended people devoid of Western psychology. He writes, “The discipline and practice designed to assist in the healing and management of the human affairs of African people must be uncompromisingly African centered and grounded in the philosophy and wisdom tradition of African people” (p. 402). Noting that Western paradigms have been used to demean, demoralize, and oppress African people, Nobles rejects their use in the psychology of Black people. He describes instead a psychology based on an African Grand Narrative, which would capture personhood, synergy, interconnectedness, circularity, holism, and collectivism. This psychology practice would be a pan-African Black psychology involving Black psychologists throughout the African world (Nobles et al., 2016). Similarly, Awosogba et al. (2023) advocates that the healing of Black people be grounded in a philosophy developed by Black people.

More research on Africa-centered psychology in Africa is needed, especially considering the diversity of people on the continent. Currently, only a few journals published in Africa are devoted to African psychology. These include the *South African Journal of Psychology*, *The Journal of Psychology in Africa*, and *Psychology in Society*.

A related concern in studying African psychology is the limited scholarship on people of African ancestry in other parts of the African Diaspora. Sutherland (2013) articulated a need for an African-centered Jamaican psychology noting that Jamaica has long struggled with foundational questions related to racial identity and African heritage. Few psychology journals and books are specific to Blacks in the Caribbean and Afro-Latinos/e/x. Of note, papers using Caribbean and Latin American samples are occasionally published in the *Journal of Black Psychology* and *Black Studies*.

African American Psychologists and African-Centered Psychology

Several African American psychologists have contributed to understanding African-centered psychology and the Africentric worldview. Seven psychologists and their contributions are discussed next.

Joseph White

Joseph White (1932–2017) was one of the most influential African-centered psychologist and is credited for the establishment of Black psychology as a discipline. White's chapter on the psychology of Black people (White, 1972) is an important early work that challenged traditional theories and frameworks to study African Americans. His work helped to reshape thinking about how African Americans should be studied. White wrote,

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the lifestyles of Black people using traditional theories developed by White psychologists to explain White people. Moreover, when these traditional theories are applied to the lives of Black folks, many incorrect, weakness-dominated, and inferiority-oriented conclusions come about. (p. 5)

White's work captured the attention of African Americans in the general public, as well as in academia. He authored a paper published in *Ebony* magazine (1970) that provided a convincing argument for why Black psychology was needed. *Ebony* is a publication targeting Black readership. White's book on Black psychology (coauthored with Thomas Parham, 1990), *The Psychology of Blacks*, was widely read by the general public and the academic community. This book advanced an understanding of the psychology of African Americans long before it was recognized as a discipline in psychology. A theme throughout the book is that Western models of human behavior are inappropriate for studying African Americans and that African Americans must define their paradigms. Four editions of the book were published (Parham et al., 2008).

Dr. White also made significant contributions to establishing programs for helping college students succeed. He established the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) while on faculty at the California State University at Long Beach. This program expanded from Long Beach to other universities in the state and provided more than 250,000 low-income and first-generation college students with opportunities for success.

Asa Hilliard

Asa Hilliard (1933–2007) was influential in many ways in promoting African-centered psychology. Historian, psychologist, and educator, Hilliard was dedicated to using education as a means to self-discovery and liberation. He saw education as one of the pillars of the African American fight for freedom (Jamison, 2020).

At the time of his death, Hilliard was a professor of educational psychology at Georgia State University. He was instrumental in developing systems for testing African American children and consulted with many school systems in ways to eliminate testing bias against African American children. As a consultant to schools and teachers, he provided training on cultural competency and pluralistic education.

Asa Hilliard is also well known for his work studying ancient African civilization. He was a founding member of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization and served as its first vice president. He believed that the teaching of Black psychology must include understanding the ancient history of Africans and advocated for African-centered education when educating African American children. He led many students and professionals on tours to Egypt, teaching them the connection between ancient African civilization and contemporary issues facing African Americans. Although he received many accolades during his lifetime, he was regarded as a humble and gracious individual who gave his wisdom and time freely to others, especially students.

Wade Nobles

Nobles advanced the Black psychology in several ways, and his writings on African philosophy serve as the foundation for Black psychology (Nobles, 1980, 1991, 2004, 2015). Nobles' work on African philosophy and how it operates in Black cultures are prominent in his contributions. Several aspects of African philosophy, including religion and philosophy, the notion of unity, the concept of time, death and immortality, and kinship, are featured in Nobles' writings. His work also addressed how Blacks maintained African beliefs and culture in this country. Nobles proposed that an orientation stemming from a particular indigenous African philosophy could be maintained only when its cultural carriers were isolated from alien cultural interaction and if their behavioral expression of the orientation did not openly conflict with the cultural-behavioral elements of the host society (Nobles, 1991, pp. 47–63). Consequently, in the United States, the isolation of Blacks through enslavement and other oppressive conditions helped to preserve African values.

Nobles' contributions to African-centered psychology are also found in his conceptualization of the self from an African-centered perspective. According to Nobles, the individual self-concept is intricately linked to the collective self. Hence, the individual self cannot exist independently from the collective self. One's identity, esteem, and worth are tied to one's identity as a person of African descent. Nobles' work has encouraged several scholars to study the relationship between individual and collective selves among African Americans (Belgrave et al., 2021; Townsend et al., 2007; Townsend & Lunphier, 2007).

Nobles and colleagues developed culturally grounded African-centered programs that address the problems of substance abuse and HIV in Black communities (Nobles et al., 2009). The Healer Women Fighting Disease (HWFD) Integrated Substance Abuse and HIV Prevention Program for Black Women used an African centered framework to support Black women in recovery and is discussed later in this chapter.

Na'im Akbar

Akbar has written and spoken extensively on the effects of oppression on Black people throughout the Diaspora. According to Akbar, many mental illnesses among African Americans are due to attempts to function within an oppressive and alien environment. Akbar classified and described some mental conditions resulting from functioning within an alien environment. One such disorder is called an *alien-self disorder*. This disorder is found among people who behave in ways counter to their natural disposition. A symptom of an alien self-disorder is materialism. On materialism, Akbar (1991b) writes, "African Americans have been socialized with materialistic goals and evaluate their worth by the prevalence of material accomplishments" (p. 343). Another disorder is the *anti-self disorder*. This disorder is found among persons who identify with the oppressor and are hostile to and reject members of their groups.

Akbar (1991a, 2004) is also known for his work on the developmental stages of studying Black or African psychology. He notes that African American psychology has been studied from Eurocentric, Black, and African perspectives. The Eurocentric perspective holds as normative a model of the middle-class Caucasian male. African Americans are seen as deficient and inferior when this model is used.

The approach of the Black perspective is to prove that Black people are not inferior. However, this perspective is reactive rather than proactive. Psychologists taking this perspective assume that differences between African and European Americans are due to environmental and sociological differences. The socio-environmental context for African Americans is primarily labeled as "low class." This perspective does not recognize the vast diversity among African Americans. It also does not recognize the diversity of the Black experience when a stereotypical template focused only on urban, low-income, inner-city environments is incorporated.

According to Akbar, the African perspective is "nature-centric" and can be described as natural psychology. This perspective assumes that there are standards and principles governing human behavior. One such principle is collective survival. From this perspective, a wide range of human behavior can be understood. In his most recent writing and speaking engagements, Akbar has addressed several social issues such as Black male–female relationships, African-centered education, alcohol and drug counseling, and counseling African American clients.

Kobi K. Kambon (aka Joseph Baldwin)

Kobi Kambon's (1943-2018) contributions to Africentric psychology have been numerous. One significant contribution has been his research on the African personality. Kambon distinguishes African-centered and non-African-centered theories of the African personality. African-centered theories assume that the African personality is core to people of African descent.

Another significant contribution has been Kambon's development of measures of African-centered principles (Jamison, 2016). To measure the African personality, Kambon developed the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASC) (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). This scale has been used extensively in studies focused on Black samples (Baldwin et al., 1992; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005; Witherspoon & Speight, 2009). Several studies have examined and confirmed the validity of this scale and its subscales (Bhagwat et al.,

2012; Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2009). The African Self-Consciousness Scale assesses how African Americans feel about African or African American culture and societal issues related to racism.

Kambon's (2003) book, *Cultural Misorientation*, discusses cultural misorientation among contemporary Blacks. According to Kambon, cultural misorientation is a condition that drives African people to engage in anti-Black, racially disempowering and self-destructive behaviors. It represents the basis for Black personality disorder. Examples of cultural misorientation can be seen in education, religious practices, and the media. For example, regarding the media, Kambon posits that media in America are controlled by and based on Eurocentric imagery. Africans subsequently accept Eurocentric media and perpetuate its imagery in Black-owned media.

Linda James Myers

Myers's contributions are found in her writings on an optimal worldview (i.e., the interconnectedness of all humans and other living things); a focus on a healthy, holistic, and integrative reality that is realistic; and African psychology (Myers, 1988, 2009; Myers et al., 2022). Although Myers examines the oppression of African Americans, her theory is not exclusive to this group. Instead, she promotes social change for all oppressed groups. Myers's optimal worldview theory promotes an appreciation of human diversity by encouraging an investigation of human behavior and social roles such as gender and ethnicity.

In introducing an optimal worldview, Myers notes that our orientation is influenced by how we perceive the world. The world we see, hear, and feel through our senses is not an external world but our projection of reality. According to Myers, understanding the perceptual system of the dominant European culture is critical for understanding how knowledge about the external world is acquired.

The Eurocentric worldview places importance on the acquisition of material objects. Furthermore, external knowledge is assumed to be the basis for all knowledge. One acquires knowledge by attending to the external world. These values result in an identity or self-worth based on external criteria (e.g., what one owns, status symbols, and job titles). Myers maintains that these assumptions are the basis for racism and other -isms, all suboptimal. According to Myers, not every one of European descent is racist, but rather, anyone buying into these assumptions is at risk for consequences that naturally follow.

On the other hand, according to Myers, African knowledge is based on the ideas that reality is both spiritual and material. Interpersonal relationships are valued, and self-knowledge is the foundation for all knowledge. Myers maintains that these assumptions result in an optimal worldview of peace and happiness. Not every one of African descent has this worldview, but this optimal worldview may be generalized across many people of African descent.

Myers also contributed to developing the Belief Systems Analysis Scale (BSAS), which measures an optimal Afrocentric worldview (Montgomery et al., 1990). The scale has been used in research that has examined Afrocentric worldviews in relation to other variables among Blacks including ethnic identity (Brookins, 1994), depression (Neblett et al., 2010), and the imposter syndrome (feeling that one is faking being smart) (Ewing et al., 1996).

Cheryl Tawede Grills

Cheryl Grills has made vital contributions to African-centered psychology through her theoretical work, methodological work on the assessment of Africentric values, and community work that uses the principles of African-centered psychology to address social and economic problems. Her writings on African-centered psychology have identified and defined critical components of African-centered psychology, such as Ma'at, Maafa, and Sankofa (these are discussed later in this chapter) (Grills, 2004; Grills et al., 2018).

Grills developed the Africentrism Scale with Longshore (Grills & Longshore, 1996). This scale is based on the principles of Nguzo Saba and has been used in several studies that assess Africentric beliefs and values. The seven principles of Nguzo Saba are Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). These principles, celebrated during Kwanzaa, provide a template for people to live by throughout the year (Karenga, 1988). The Africentrism Scale has been used to examine Africentric values and the relation of Africentric values with variables such as academic self-concept (Williams & Chung, 2013), drug use (Brook & Pahl, 2005), and help-seeking behaviors (Wallace & Constantine, 2005).

Grills successfully used an African-centered approach to address problems in the Black community. These include programs and interventions to reduce relapse among drug abusers (Longshore & Grills, 2000). Her work with community groups involves creating healthy environments to improve health conditions in Black communities (e.g., reductions of obesity and access to healthy foods [Grills et al., 2014]).

These seven African-centered psychologists have all made unique contributions to understanding African-centered psychology. They share several common features: They all assume that the study of African American psychology has to be based on an understanding of the African worldview and that this worldview is adaptive and functional for people of African descent. They all assume that people of African descent are the best prepared to define and study Black people.

Furthermore, they all believe the methodology for conducting research and acquiring knowledge must not be based on Western paradigms. Six are past national presidents of the ABPsi (White, Nobles, Akbar, Kambon, Myers, and Grills). Three have advanced African-centered psychology by developing valid and culturally relevant measures of Africentric beliefs and personality (Kambon, Myers, and Grills).

African-centered psychologists have strongly advocated for social, political, and economic justice within the African American and pan-African communities. They have been at the forefront of fighting against oppression, domination, and racism and have communicated how these conditions contribute to poor mental health among people of African descent. The work of several early African-centered psychologists influenced their thinking and writing. These include Bobby Wright, who wrote in the early 1970s about Black menticide (refers to the destruction of the Black mind; Rashid, 2005), and Amos Wilson, who chronicled in his classic book *Blueprint for Black Power* a detailed strategy for African American and Caribbean Blacks to gain economic power in the 21st century (Wilson, 1998). Shawn Utsey's work on Africultural coping and counseling people of African descent has spawned much research (Utsey et al., 2015; Utsey et al., 2009; Utsey et al., 2004). Fred Phillips's African-centered approach, "NTU" (which means essence

of life) has encouraged African-centered clinical and therapeutic approaches for addressing mental health needs among Blacks (Hollingsworth & Phillips, 2017; Phillips, 1990; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010).

African Philosophy

Several African scholars have written on African philosophy, which provides a foundation for African-centered psychology. A thorough discussion of African philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter but can be found in the *African Philosophy Reader*, edited by Coetzee and Roux (2003). This reader contains 49 papers, primarily written by African scholars, on the nature and discourse of African philosophy. A brief overview of some of the central assumptions of African philosophy written by African scholars is discussed next.

First, African scholars caution against general statements regarding all Africans but believe some broad generalities exist among people across the continent. Teffo and Roux (2003) wrote that there is diversity regarding metaphysical thinking (i.e., understanding reality beyond immediate senses) in Africa. However, the views are alike in a relatively large part of Africa, which can represent metaphysical thinking in Africa. They identify religious beliefs related to the African conceptions of God, the universe, and their interrelations as central to Africans. Also, African metaphysics is holistic, and reality is a closed system so that everything bands together and is affected by any change in the system. Teffo and Roux note that dualism found in Western thought, such as distinguishing between the natural and the supernatural and the material and spiritual, is absent from African metaphysics. In Western thinking, knowledge is the possession of a particular individual, and the focus is how this knowledge can be accounted for or assessed. In African thinking, the starting point is social relationships. One's selfhood is seen and accounted for from a relational perspective.

Kaphagawani and Malherbe (1998) discuss epistemology or how one acquires knowledge. One way is through sages, who, in traditional African society, are a rich source of knowledge. Sages may or may not hold formal education but possess knowledge and are respected for their knowledge. There are such individuals in every community; most often, these individuals are considered elders.

The Africentric dimensions discussed next are not unique to people of African descent, and many of these dimensions are characteristic of other cultural groups (see Table 2.1). The distinction has been made between individualistic cultures, such as that of the United States, and collectivist cultures, such as those found in Asia (Triandis, 1995). Individualistic cultures are those where people are oriented to look out for themselves and their immediate families. In collective cultures, people are oriented toward the needs of the groups in which they belong (Shiraev & Levy, 2010). Africentric dimensions are likely to be found among people in cultures that prioritize collectivist values. Several non-Western cultural groups and ethnic minority groups in this country, including Latinos/e/x, Native Americans, and Asians, may hold worldview dimensions similar in some respects to the dimensions discussed next (Zea et al., 1996). Although the dimensions of the Africentric worldview are discussed separately, for clarity, these dimensions should not be considered independent. They are interdependent and correlated with one another. Central to Africentric thinking is the concept of holism. Holism provides an overarching framework for Africentric beliefs. All aspects of one's being are integrated, in harmony, and balanced. See Table 2.1 for examples of an African-center and Eurocentric worldviews.

Table 2.1 ■ Contrasting an Africentric With a Eurocentric Worldview

Belief System	African-Centered	Eurocentric
Spirituality	Spirituality is interwoven in all aspects of life. There is no separation between spirituality and everyday activities.	Spirituality is seen in the practice of religious worship and rituals. There is a separation of religion from other aspects of life.
<i>Example</i>	<i>It is ok to offer a prayer during a routine meeting.</i>	<i>I pray during religious services.</i>
Collectivism	The well-being of the group to which one belongs is most important. Emphasis is placed on maintaining harmony within the group.	The well-being of the individual and those closest to the individual is most important. Emphasis is placed on individual achievement.
<i>Example</i>	<i>I will make a career decision based on my family's including my extended family's well-being.</i>	<i>I will decide based on what is best for my career and perhaps my immediate family.</i>
Time Orientation	Time is cyclical rather than linear. Time is flexible and is to be used rather than dictated. The past is as important as the present and the future.	Time is a commodity and a resource. Time is exact, precise and dictates when events start and end. Emphasis is on the future.
<i>Example</i>	<i>The party begins when I get there.</i>	<i>I have to be at the party by 8 pm.</i>
Orality	Oral communication is essential in conversation. Oral communication between sages and elders is valued.	Written communication is most credible, primarily when experts deliver information.
<i>Example</i>	<i>Face-to-face discussions with an elder help me be a better parent.</i>	<i>A scientific study on parenting helps me be a better parent.</i>
Sensitivity to Affect and Emotional Cues	Attention is given to the emotional state of others, and it is important to recognize and share the joy and pain of others.	Attention is focused on one's own emotions, and the emotional state of others does not impact one's emotional state.
<i>Example</i>	<i>I am ok if you are ok. If you are sad, I am sad.</i>	<i>Your being sad does not make me sad.</i>
Verve and Rhythm	One prefers movement and stimulation and changes in stimuli in the environment.	Preference for consistency and routine environment.
<i>Example</i>	<i>I cannot sit when the music is playing.</i>	<i>I am not moved to get up by music.</i>
Balance and Harmony with Nature	Preference is to live in harmony with nature and appropriately use nature's resources.	Preference is for the control and mastery of nature.
<i>Example</i>	<i>I must not waste natural resources.</i>	<i>I can collect all the natural resources I can afford.</i>

Spirituality

Spirituality is a fundamental Africentric dimension interwoven in African people's lives. The African belief system is that ultimate power over the world is in the hands of God (Mabvurira et al., 2021). Mattis and Watson (2009) define spirituality as a relationship between transcendent forces (e.g., God, spirits) and humans that result in the individual's recognition of the sacredness of all things and a conscious commitment to live a life of virtue. In the United States, spirituality is seen in religious worship and rituals, such as attending Church, praying, and celebrating religious holidays. Within Western culture, spirituality is reflected in religiosity and may be kept separate from other aspects of one's life. This separation is partly due to the separation of Church and state. (See Chapter 10 for a fuller discussion of religion and spirituality in Africa.)

According to Wiredu (2003), the Ghanaian scholar, the Akans, and other African people have a religious aspect to their culture and an unmistakable belief in a supreme being. He writes, "There is virtual unanimity, in particular, on the report that Africans strongly believe in the existence of God" (p. 21). In African culture, spirituality is not separated from other aspects of one's life. One's spirituality is woven into one's daily activities. Moreover, most indigenous African religions have unique beliefs and practices related to the physical environment. For example, in the Shona traditional religion, certain natural artifacts such as trees, rivers, mountains, animals, and birds are considered sacred and should be conserved.

According to Nobles (1991), in traditional African culture, spirituality was such an integral part of one's existence that it could not be separated from the person. Spirituality was central in one's life from conception to post-physical death. One's being was, in fact, a religious or spiritual experience. According to Akbar (1996), man is essentially the spirit at the highest form of life. Spiritual beliefs have been compared with materialistic beliefs. The highest fulfillment for those with a spiritual worldview is the development of the self into a spiritual being that exists in harmony with other aspects of the universe. In contrast, the fulfillment of a material worldview is the acquisition of material goods and services. Societies that have reached the highest levels of human refinement, sensitivity, and cultural dignity are those with a widely accepted and powerful image of God (Akbar, 1996).

Although spirituality and religiosity differ, they are associated. Spiritual people are likely to engage in religious practices, such as praying and attending Church and Mosque. According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (Pew Forum, 2021), African Americans are more religious than the U.S. population overall. African Americans have higher levels of religious affiliation, religious service attendance, and beliefs in the importance of prayer and religion in their lives (Mohamed et al., 2021). Religious practices among African Americans are reflected in several ways. African Americans, compared with other racial or ethnic groups, spend more time in Church and other places of worship (Mohamed et al., 2021). African Americans are also more likely to use spirituality to provide comfort (Taylor et al., 1999) and as a framework for coping with stressful circumstances brought about by family, work, health, and financial problems (Holt et al., 2014; Mattis & Watson, 2009). African Americans report that in times of stress, faith (e.g., attending religious services, praying, using religious coping strategies, and using pastoral support) is important (Mattis & Watson, 2009). Among people of African ancestry, spirituality and religious behaviors exist across all socio-economic levels, age groups, and geographical locations.

Collectivism

A collective orientation is an Africentric dimension that reinforces interdependence, cooperation, and the motivation to work for the group's survival rather than for the individual.

The collectivistic orientation differs from the individualistic and competitive orientation in Western culture. The Ubuntu saying in the Zulu language or Asafo Kutu among the Ga-Adangbe (oneness in group or community) reflects the collectivistic orientation, "I am because we are, and because we are, I am" (Mbiti, 2015; Nonterah et al., 2023). In a collectivistic culture, the individual's experiences influence the group's experiences and vice versa. The individual does not exist apart from the group (Nobles, 1991). Competition is minimized in collective cultures, and harmony within the group is emphasized. The collectivistic orientation values interpersonal relationships. Relationships with other persons are essential because one's well-being is interwoven with that of significant others (Mkhize, 2021). Okolo, the African philosopher, writes, "Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings and from its connection with animals or inanimate forces around it" (Okolo, 2003, p. 213).

In African cultures, the collectivistic orientation helped to ensure the survival of the community one was a member of. Africans' strong commitment to kinship included sharing common beliefs, which helped sustain all members of the group (Nobles, 1991). When one member suffered, all suffered, and when one member did well, all did well. Loneliness and alienation are not found in African cultural groups because the members of each ethnic group are interconnected: Members have concern for and take responsibility for one another (White & Parham, 1990). Aggression and violence are minimized within groups. From a collectivistic perspective, an act of aggression against another member of the group is viewed as an act of aggression toward oneself (Nobles, 1976). Among collective groups, this collectivism is not extended to all persons but to the ethnic group or specific community to which one belongs.

Among many contemporary African Americans, collective orientation is reflected through a strong commitment to the family, the extended family, and fictive kin (McAdoo, 2007; Nobles, 1991). Fictive kin are individuals who are not related biologically or through marriage but are treated as they are. The collective orientation is reflected in frequent contact with the immediate and extended family, the tendency of family members to live near one another, and the care provided for the elderly and family members, including those with disabilities (Belgrave et al., 2021).

Research on collective versus individual orientations among African Americans is equivocal. A study by Oyserman et al. (2002) found that African Americans were more individualistic than European Americans and Latinos/e/x, especially concerning individualistic traits such as value for personal uniqueness, privacy, and competition, traits traditionally associated with individualism. These components of individualism are different from other aspects, such as focusing on the self and excluding others. Similarly, Komarraju and Cokley (2008) noted that the manifestation of individualism and collectivism may be associated with contextual factors such as history, beliefs about equality, and freedom to be oneself without social comparison. More research is needed to discern the different components of individualistic beliefs among African Americans.

Time Orientation

Time is viewed differently in Western compared to African cultures. Time within Western culture is future-oriented, whereas time within African culture is past, present, and future-oriented (Akbar, 1991a). Time for West Africans was experienced through the life of the ethnic group that goes back many generations (Nobles, 1991). Time in African cultures is cyclical rather than linear. The past is important in African cultures because it shapes the direction of present-day life experiences. African cultures make future decisions based on what has happened in the past.

In Western culture, time is a concrete commodity to be bought and sold (Akbar, 1991a). It is seen as mathematical and bound by the clock. In contrast, time among Africans is flexible and elastic and exists to meet the needs of the people. Africans experience time subjectively, which reduces the need to impose one's own time on others. According to Akbar (1991a), future Western orientation creates urgency and pressure because it is impossible to ever catch up with the future. Future time orientation is reflected in Western psychology's emphasis on prediction and control.

Among Blacks, time orientation can be captured by the expression "colored people's time" (CPT). CPT means that arriving late is acceptable or that time must be experienced to be valid. A CPT orientation is found among Black people throughout the Diaspora. Jones (2003) commented on his experiences with time in Trinidad. He noticed that people from Trinidad have personal control over time; they are not driven or enslaved by it. Things start when people arrive and end when they leave.

Hofstede (2001) surveyed respondents from 36 countries on their time orientation—whether it was predominantly short- or long-term. People who live in cultures or countries with long-term time orientations tend to delay gratification of material, social, and emotional needs and think more about the future (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013). People living in countries with short-term time orientation think less about the future and act more in the present. Hofstede categorized the 36 countries into one of the three groups of 12 each: short-term, long-term, and a time orientation, which is neither short nor long. Seven of the 12 countries he categorized as short-term were in Africa (Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). Interestingly, the United States was also one of the 12 countries categorized as short-term—none of the countries categorized as long-term were in Africa.

Orality

Orality is a preference for orally receiving stimuli and information from the external world. This orientation may be contrasted with one that prefers visual and written stimuli and information. African cultures, compared with Western cultures, may be more oral in orientation.

Orality is used when information is handed down from elder to younger members of a family, or ethnic group. Historically, in Africa, the culture of an ethnic group was orally transmitted from generation to generation. On coming to the New World, the oral orientation helped enslaved people retain their African culture and function in the New World since they frequently were not allowed to read or write. The oral orientation is reflected in present-day Black's storytelling, rap music, and spoken word performance. With technologically advanced ways of transmitting information (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Tumblr), it is possible to receive virtually all types of information without

oral communication. These means of communication allow for faster dissemination of information but may counter the oral preference of some people of African descent. More research on preferences for oral versus non-oral methods for communicating and obtaining information among African Americans is needed.

Sensitivity to Affect and Emotional Cues

The sensitivity to affect and emotional cues is an orientation that acknowledges the emotional and affective states of self and others. This dimension is related to the collective orientation, which includes considering other people. Among people of African descent, there is an extended sensitivity to the emotional and affective states of others (Boykin & Ellison, 1995; Randolph & Banks, 1993). This orientation emphasizes emotional receptivity and expression. It is seen when one empathizes with and relates to others. From this perspective, we can feel the pain and the joy of others and expect others to feel our pain and joy. Similarly, an individual's affective states are linked to the feelings and emotional experiences of significant others. The sensitivity to affect and emotional cue orientation leads to synchronicity between one's emotions and affective states and others' thoughts and behaviors. For example, if a person feels happy, they are more likely to engage in positive behavior. If unhappy, they are less likely to engage in positive behavior.

Sensitivity to others' orientation can be contrasted to an emotionally isolated orientation whereby one's affective state is determined by one's individual and personal level of functioning. Here, one's emotional and affective state is determined in isolation from the emotional state of others.

Verve and Rhythm

Behaviors that are rhythmic and creative reflect the verve and rhythm dimension. This may be seen in movement, posture, speech patterns, and behavior. Verve can be considered an improvisational style among African Americans (Boykin, 1983; Chimezie, 1988). Verve and rhythm orientations are related to time orientations insofar as natural rhythm dictates how one functions and presents oneself (Nobles, 1991). A person with verve walks, talks, and presents creatively and expressively. Rhythm is a recurring pattern of behavior that gives energy and meaning to one's experiences of the external environment (Jones, 2003).

Verve suggests a preference for the simultaneous, complementary, coordinated, or novel experience of several stimuli rather than a singular and routine stimulus. It is characterized by an increased appeal for stimuli that changes by increases in energy level and pace. According to Boykin (1983), verve is important in how children learn. The didactic "teacher talks and students listen" mode of learning may not work as well with African American children as it does with European American children because of differences in preferences for verve and rhythm. African American children might learn better through multiple teaching and learning methods (interactions with each other, movement, touching, etc.) (Cole & Boykin, 2008). Research suggests that African American students prefer classroom structures with verve (and communalism) in contrast to competitive and individualist classroom structures (Sankofa et al., 2019).

In speaking of rhythm and music, Ramose, the African scholar, expresses a conceptualization of rhythm and verve through a discussion of music and "be-ing." With music,

there is the notion of participation rather than being a passive observer. For Africans, the invitation to the dance of be-ing is indeclinable; there is a saying among Bantu-speaking languages that “you do not listen to music seated” (Ramose, 2003, p. 235).

Balance and Harmony With Nature

African thought is the continual quest for consensus to establish harmony (Ramose, 2003). In African philosophy, it is essential to have balance and harmony with nature (Nobles, 1991; Parham, 2009). Balance and harmony are necessary for one’s well-being; it is necessary to balance one’s mental, physical, and spiritual states. Within the African tradition, this assumes that the various aspects of one’s self are intricately connected and there is a oneness of mind, body, and spirit (Mkhize, 2021).

The importance of living in harmony with nature is also seen in African cultures. Nature includes the animals, plants, and natural phenomena that constitute the environment in which humans live. The desired goal of life is not to conquer nature and the physical elements but rather to live in harmony with them (Ramose, 2003). The natural environment is believed to be an extension of humanity to be maintained for future generations (Sodi et al., 2021). According to Nobles (1991) and Parham (2009), everything in nature, including humans, animals, and plants, is interconnected. Therefore, control and mastery over nature, a prominent theme in Western philosophy, do not exist in African philosophy. Although these dimensions are not the only characteristics found among people of African descent, they are core to rendering this group distinct (Randolph & Banks, 1993).

Other Aspects of Africentric Psychology

In a thoughtful review of African psychology, Grills (2004) discusses seven related concepts that anchor and frame African psychology.

1. *Ma’at* is a cardinal principle that governs the dynamic functioning of the universe and refers to balance and cosmic order. There are seven cardinal virtues of *ma’at*: truth, justice, compassion, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order. The more one practices these virtues, the more developed one’s self becomes.
2. *Maafa* is the word used to describe the enslavement of Africans by Europeans. The *maafa* was designed to oppress, humiliate, and destroy African people. Critical to *maafa* is the denial of the humanity of Africans. It is seen today in oppressive and discriminatory actions against Blacks.
3. *Veneration of the person* assumes the value of all living beings. A person’s life is interwoven with the lives of everyone else. This includes both the living and the departed. In short, life is venerated, cherished, and celebrated.
4. *Spiritness* is a concept whose meaning is to be full of life—to have a mind, soul, energy, and passion. From the Africentric perspective, spirit is both real and symbolic and is the divine spark that makes humans who they are.
5. *Human authenticity* is the condition of being sincere and who you are meant to be. It is the quality of being genuine and free of imitation. When authenticity is absent, one is unsure whom to trust or rely on.

6. *Inclusive metaphysical epistemology* refers to using both affective and cognitive syntheses of information as a way of knowing. Reality is not limited to what the five senses understand, and rational logic is not the only way of obtaining knowledge.
7. *Sankofa* is an Akan Adinkra symbol that means that in order to go forward, one must look back. In contemporary African American culture, one must look back at historical events to learn from them and plan for the future. Sankofa also symbolizes one's return to African culture and identity for guidance.

According to Grills (2004), understanding the concepts of Ma'at, maafa, veneration of the person, spiritness, human authenticity, inclusive metaphysical epistemology, and Sankofa, along with Africentric worldview dimensions, are central to understanding African psychology.

Another aspect of African philosophy is reverence for the dead. The African scholar Oruka (2002) writes that one cultural value in traditional African culture is the reverence for and communication with the dead. From this perspective, the living will advance the wishes and expectations of the dead.

South African scholar Nhlanhla Mkhize (2021) identifies other features of Pan-African Psychology as follows:

1. Knowledge is always incomplete. This is the belief that knowledge is continual and comes about from dialogues with others who differ from ourselves.
2. Life energy and transformation. This is the belief that life is a series of transformations from one state of being to another. Beliefs in transformation are seen in the myths and practices among Africans.
3. The Polarity Principle. This principle means that everything has its pair of opposites.
4. The Multiplicity of People. This is the belief that people are comprised of multiple dimensions—including the physical body, the spirit, and the shadow; the self is represented by the past, present, and future.
5. Self-knowledge is the basis of all knowledge. This principle came out of the psychology of Kemet which advocates knowledge of the self as necessary for peace and well-being.

The dimensions and features discussed in this section vary among people of African descent but in general constitute a distinct belief system among most.

Can an African Worldview Exist Among Contemporary African Americans?

The belief that an African worldview exists among Blacks in the United States has been questioned for two reasons. One, people on the African continent are diverse and thus not likely to hold universal beliefs and values. Two, Africans in America have been socialized for several centuries and may have lost African traditions in the socialization process. In addressing these issues, Nobles (1991) wrote that although many West African ethnicities and subgroups have different languages and religions and many unique customs, many similarities suggest a common ethos among persons of African descent.

In the New World, enslaved Africans held on to the African worldview because it provided a familiar pattern of beliefs, habits, and ways of behaving that were adaptive in an oppressive environment (Nobles, 1991). Physical and environmental isolation helped Africans in the New World retain their culture. Blacks were cut off from the civilization of Europeans, and their culture was retained to survive. Enslaved Africans were frequently not allowed to read or write, and there was none of our contemporary means—televisions, radio, internet, cell phones, or other modes of transmission—by which they could assimilate European culture. Blacks have continued to be physically and geographically isolated in many urban areas. Blacks almost exclusively populate some inner cities or specific urban neighborhoods (Belgrave et al., 2021).

One study demonstrated the continuity of values among African Americans and Africans. Hurley and Hurley (2021) recruited 215 students from public schools in low-income suburbs of major urban centers in South Africa and the United States. Students were administered measures of communalism, and the LCS (learning context scenarios), which assesses respondents' attitudes towards hypothetical peers whose learning orientations were consistent with communalism and verve or competition and individualism. The authors found more similarities than differences in responses from South African and African American students.

Contemporary Issues

Hip-Hop: From West Africa to the Bronx

When we think about the origins of hip-hop music, we often cite the South Bronx during the mid-1970s as the time when contemporary hip-hop music emerged. However, hip-hop goes back much farther to traditions and manners of expression that have existed for centuries in West Africa (Keyes, 2002). In a paper on hip-hop music and culture, Payne and Gibson (2009) analyze West Africa's influence on contemporary hip-hop. According to Payne and Gibson, the character and foundations of hip-hop can be seen in the musical expressions of griots of West Africa who were involved in the bardic tradition. Bards were believed to be able to display the spirit of *Nyama*; *Nyama* is the transference of positive and negative energy through speech, music, and movement. Bards also used poetry and folklore, known as the animal trickster tales. The animal trickster tales made their way to the slave quarters and evolved in the United States into slave trickster tales (Levine, 1977). These tales revolved around the theme of the powerless (enslaved) developing ways to outsmart and defeat the oppressors (White enslavers). These tales have similar messages to the unique and rebellious lyrics that took root in hip-hop music and culture. West African traditional and contemporary expressions highlight the salience of the oral tradition, a core defining attribute for people of African descent. Hip-hop music is here to stay and, with it, linkages to oral traditions in West Africa.

A second way of transmitting African culture and worldview has been through the oral tradition. Enslaved Africans brought their oral tradition with them to the New World. Laws that did not permit enslaved people to read and write reinforced the retention of this tradition. Oral communication became essential for survival. This tradition has been passed down through the generations and can be seen in contemporary music and expressions, including hip-hop (see "Contemporary Issues: Hip-Hop").

Spirituality also helped Africans in the New World to maintain the African worldview. Under harsh and oppressive conditions, spirituality provided a reason for living. This ideology continues in present-day beliefs. The fulfillment of the spiritual self is not linked to external criteria but rather to a relationship with God or a similar higher power. One's life is meaningful if one is spiritual and lives for a higher calling.

The extended family and fictive kin also supported Africans in the New World in maintaining African beliefs and preferences. In Africa, members of an ethnic group worked and lived interdependently. On the plantation, biological families were separated and sold. Once sold, families often did not see each other again. Therefore, biologically unrelated enslaved people on the plantation related to one another as family. The inclusion of non-biologically related persons in the family is known today as "fictive kinship" (McAdoo, 2007; Nobles, 1991). Black families and kin have had to rely on each other due to economic hardships, and this reliance has fostered collectivism.

Acculturation affects how much African Americans have assimilated to the Eurocentric worldview. Acculturation is the degree to which a minority culture adopts the values and customs of the majority culture. African Americans have a fair amount of acculturation, with some individuals being more acculturated than others. Geographical location determined the degree to which enslaved Africans were acculturated. For example, the Geechees (also known as the Gullahs), a geographically isolated group of African Americans who live on the coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina, had behaviors and language patterns in which African culture was highly evident. Their geographic isolation resulted in lower levels of acculturation relative to other African Americans (Ganatra, 2023; White & Parham, 1990). Residents on the Gullah Islands retained much of the culture from West Africa because of segregation until bridges connected the islands and the mainland in the 1950s. Today, there are concerted efforts among the Gullah people to keep their culture alive and to carry it into the next generation. For example, Gullah food is similar to some African dishes, and the people have maintained the craft of basket weaving found in African cultures. Today, about 200,000 Gullahs uphold their historic customs (Ganatra, 2023).

African-Centered Research With African Americans

Although research in African-centered psychology remains relatively limited, some studies have been published over the past 50 years. Most of the studies have examined the relationship between the Africentric worldview and other psychological and sociological variables, such as racial identity (Brookins, 1994; Jagers et al., 1997), self-esteem (Constantine et al., 2006), mental health (Azibo & Dixon, 1998; Hatcher et al., 2017; Neblett et al., 2010), drug use (Belgrave, 2000a), and violence prevention (Whaley & McQueen, 2020). Prevention and intervention programs that are framed using an Africentric worldview are discussed later in this chapter.

Sankofa et al. (2023) assessed 200 African American fourth and sixth-grade students from urban and suburban schools' preference for classrooms that were consistent or not with African-centered values. Students were presented with hypothetical classroom scenarios. One classroom was described as promoting thinking and behavior congruent with individualism and competition (e.g., usually puts the test with the highest grade on the bulletin board). The other classroom was described as promoting behaviors and attitudes

consistent with communalism and *verve* (e.g., students are encouraged to visit other communities to borrow supplies and get suggestions on completing their work). The authors found that students preferred classrooms set up to encourage activities and physical environments supporting communalism and high *verve*.

Africentric beliefs have been linked to self-esteem and self-worth. High Africentric beliefs may be linked to self-esteem through involvement in positive family and community activities that promote feelings of self-worth and well-being. In addition, Africentric beliefs might positively influence ethnic identity, which influences self-esteem. Constantine et al. (2006) investigated the relationship between Africentric cultural values, self-esteem, and other variables in 147 African American adolescent girls (mean age = 15). Constantine and colleagues administered the Africentric Value Scale for Children and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a global measure of self-esteem and a measure of life satisfaction, along with other measures. They found that greater adherence to Africentric cultural values was predictive of higher levels of self-esteem, perceived social support, and life satisfaction.

Similarly, Africentric values were related to more favorable academic outcomes among African American college students. Using a sample of 119 African American college students, Williams and Chung (2013) found a significant relationship between an Africentric cultural orientation and academic self-concept. The authors found a significant relationship between Africentric cultural orientation and involvement in culturally relevant school and community activities in this same study. The findings from this study suggest that Africentric values are linked to engaging in culturally congruent behaviors.

A few studies have examined Africentric beliefs and drug use, mostly among African American youth. A study by Nasim et al. (2007) is illustrative. This study found a significant relationship between Africentric beliefs and other cultural variables (e.g., ethnic identity, religiosity) and alcohol use among African American adolescents who lived in low-resource communities. One hundred and fourteen youths ages 13 to 20 participated in the study. The authors found that Africentric beliefs delayed alcohol initiation: Adolescents with higher levels of Africentric beliefs initiated alcohol use later than those with lower Africentric beliefs. Africentric beliefs were also linked to lower lifetime alcohol use.

An Africentric worldview may also have indirect or protective effects on drug use. Nasim et al. (2007) found that Africentric beliefs (along with religiousness) were especially beneficial in reducing alcohol use when participants lived and attended school in communities where their peers were involved in deviant and problem behaviors.

Africentric beliefs and mental health have also been studied. Wang et al. (2013) investigated the influence of an Africentric worldview on reasons for living, an indicator of suicidal ideation. They also investigated the role of depression in this relationship. Two hundred and eighty-nine African American college students completed a survey that assessed reasons for living, an Africentric worldview, and other variables. They found that strong Africentric values predicted lower depression, which predicted greater reasons for living. Neblett et al. (2010) also found a significant relationship between Africentric worldview beliefs and depressive symptoms, with strong Africentric worldview beliefs linked to less depression.

Finally, research in Africa similarly confirmed a positive relationship between Africentric components and well-being. A study conducted in Ghana with mothers of children with intellectual disabilities found that an Africentric worldview was negatively associated with psychological distress and parenting stress among mothers of children

with intellectual disabilities (Oti-Boadi & Mate-Kole, 2018). In summary, research supports that Africentric beliefs are associated with better mental health, higher self-esteem, and fewer problem behaviors such as drug use. However, further research is needed.

Methodological and Research Issues

There are two central methodological topics to consider in African-centered psychology. One revolves around how we study people of African descent. The second topic is measuring Africentric values, beliefs, and constructs. These are discussed next.

Methods for Studying People of African Descent

The psychology of African Americans cannot be studied with the same methodology used to study European Americans. Carruthers (1996) argues specifically against using the experimental method to study African Americans, noting that this method, emphasizing control and prediction, has been used to control oppressed people.

Kambon's (1998) analysis of Africentric and non-Africentric theories of African personality suggests another concern with the scientific method. In its attempt to isolate discrete cause-and-effect relationships between variables, the scientific method may be inherently biased toward Eurocentric or non-Africentric explanations or perspectives of African behavior. Kambon asserts that non-Africentric (e.g., Eurocentric) theories of personality focus exclusively on the individual. Within Eurocentric psychology, each individual is seen as unique, with a personalized biopsychological condition that makes the person a distinguishable significant entity. Persons outside this unique individual are not considered as they are in African psychology. Kambon's analysis is consistent with African philosophy's focus on the collective self (Mkhize, 2021).

Semaj (1996) also rejected using the experimental method as the scientific method to study Black people. Semaj rejected the myth that science is objective, culturally universal, and unemotional. He disputed the notion that science leads systematically to the truth. According to Semaj, the knowledge gained from studying society can never be passive but is always active in maintaining or destroying a social system. Semaj further points out that despite the many academic degrees awarded, society's problems remain relatively unchanged. Semaj (pp. 198–199) offers alternative guidelines for conducting research with people of African descent:

1. Self-knowledge should be of primary importance. "Know thyself."
2. There should be no artificial divisions via discipline; such divisions do not allow for the collective efforts that come about through diversity.
3. There should be no limitations on issues studied and methodologies used to study them. Scholars should be free to study what is important and not just what is dictated by one's discipline.
4. There should be no scientific colonization. Research should be conducted that will serve people's interests rather than advance a career or satisfy individual interests.
5. There should be a concern with the interpretation and application of data. The scientist should ensure that their findings are appropriately interpreted and applied.

6. The publication and dissemination of work should be done by those who share the vision of liberation.
7. Researchers should practice what they preach. The lifestyle of the researcher should be consistent with his or her work.

South African scholar Augustine Nwoye (2015) provides a similar perspective concerning methods for studying people of African descent, noting differences in research approaches between African and Western psychology (see Table 2.2). For example, from an African-centered perspective, behaviors are influenced by many factors (e.g., relationship with others, spirituality, ancestors) that may not be observable or subject to quantitative measurement.

Table 2.2 ■ Methodological Assumptions in Western and African Psychology	
Western Psychology	African Psychology
Use of objective quantitative measures and instruments	Humans are studied within their relationships and contexts, including invisible and intangible realities
Defines humans in material, measurable, or observable terms	Acknowledges that spirituality and religion, which are invisible, are an essential influence on humans
Humans have no significant meaning beyond what is observed	Humans live their lives according to what things mean to them (e.g., people's words or actions)
The human mind dies with the death of the body	The death of the body does not mean the death of the mind and memory, as seen in the belief in ancestors

Source: Nwoye, A. (2015). What is African psychology the psychology of? *Theory & Psychology*, 25(1), 96-116.

How Is the Africentric Worldview Measured?

Increased interest in the Africentric worldview has raised attention to methods of measuring this construct and its relevant dimensions. Several scales have been developed to assess Africentric constructs over the past two decades. As noted previously, an Africentric worldview involves the cognitive and perceptual structures that organize our understanding derived from people of African descent and include those values. Beliefs are reflected by the dimensions discussed previously (i.e., spirituality, collectivism, flexible time orientation, and so on). A few measures have been developed to assess the Africentric concepts discussed previously. We discuss some of the work on measuring the Africentric worldview next.

African Self-Consciousness Scale

Baldwin (aka Kambon) developed the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASC) to assess dimensions of Black personality (Baldwin & Bell, 1985). This scale is the most well-known among all such scales measuring Black personality and has been widely used with African American populations. According to Baldwin, the core of the Black personality is the oneness of being that is reflected in an extension of self and a communal orientation. The ASC assesses self-extension and communal orientation.

Several dimensions core to African self-consciousness are captured in this measure, including the awareness that one is of African heritage, priorities placed on Black survival and liberation, priorities placed on activities directed at self-knowledge and self-affirmations, and resistance toward anti-Black forces and threats to Black survival. These dimensions cover educational, family, religious, cultural activities, interpersonal relations, and political orientation.

The scale consists of 42 items. One item is, “I do not necessarily feel like I am also being mistreated in a situation where I see another Black person being mistreated.” A Likert-type format that ranges from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 8 = “strongly agree” is used. Higher scores represent stronger African self-consciousness.

The scale has been used in several studies, including studies of Africentric values and racial identity and psychological well-being (Pierre & Mahalik, 2005), community responsibility and achievement (Robinson & Biran, 2006), help-seeking behavior (Duncan, 2003), and counselor preference (Duncan & Johnson, 2007). Validation studies with the ASC support the scale’s validity or some of its subscales (Bhagwat et al., 2012; Simmons et al., 2008).

Asante Afrocentricity Scale

Pellebon (2011) developed a scale based on Molefi Asante’s Afrocentric paradigm, believing it to be the most logical starting point for an Afrocentric Scale because Asante founded Afrocentricity. Since an Afrocentrist is a scientist, any critical analysis and study of human behavior must be supported by reason and evidence. The Asante Afrocentricity Scale has three main dimensions: (a) cultural centeredness (e.g., “If someone from my race is treated unfairly, everyone in my race has been treated unfairly”); (b) spirituality and ancestral connection (e.g., “My spirit is connected to all things in the universe”); and (c) Afrocentric epistemology (e.g., “An important source of knowledge and truth for me is my ancestor’s culture and traditions”). The scale has 24 items and uses a Likert-type five-point format that ranges from strongly agree to disagree strongly. The development of the Asante Afrocentricity Scale involved data collected on university students and faculty. More research with other samples is indicated.

The Communalism Scale

The Communalism Scale, developed by Boykin et al. (1997), assesses the Africentric dimension of communalism. Communalism is akin to collectivism. It reflects interdependence among people and is associated with cooperation, shared interests and activities, and concern for others. Communalism places greater emphasis on the group’s survival than on the individual. Communalism is a central dimension because it reinforces the other Africentric worldview dimensions.

The Communalism Scale measures how connected the respondent feels to others in their family, community, and other environments. The scale consists of 31 items rated based on Likert-type responses ranging from 1 = “completely false” to 6 = “completely true.” Nine filler items are included to reduce response set and social desirability. An example of a scale item is, “I place great value on social relations among people.” The Communalism Scale has been used in several studies that have examined communalism and its relationship to other variables among African Americans (Bediako & Neblett, 2011; Gooden & McMahon, 2016; Johnson & Carter, 2020; Hurley et al., 2023).

In summary, some measures for assessing the Africentric worldview exist. These measures are based on the Africentric dimensions (e.g., communalism, spirituality) and other African-centered values and beliefs. Research on measuring Africentric constructs is likely to continue.

Best Practices for Increasing African-Centered Values

Research on the effectiveness of programs based on African-centered theory remains relatively limited. More programs have engaged African American youth than adults. Increased interest in African-centered psychology should encourage additional programmatic work in this area.

Africentric Programs for Youth

Jones and Neblett (2016) provide a comprehensive review of prevention and intervention programs targeted at positive youth development among African Americans that integrated Africentric principles in program format and activities. According to S. C. Jones and Neblett, culturally sensitive prevention and intervention programs provide additional benefits to standard interventions.

Seventeen programs were identified that focused on African American youth under 18 and that integrated Africentric principles, racial or ethnic identity, or racial socialization. Out of the 17 programs, 15 integrated Africentric principles, most often using the principles of Nguzo Saba. An example of such a program is one developed and implemented by Thomas et al. (2008). The aim of this after-school program for high school females was to increase positive cultural factors such as ethnic or racial identity, racism awareness, youth activism, and a collective orientation. The 10-week program emphasized expressions of collectivism and unity, the shared historical experiences of Black people in the United States, and the principles of Nguzo Saba. For example, Ujima was infused by having the group work collectively to complete group projects. Ujamaa was demonstrated by having participants hold a bake sale to raise money for a field trip to the African American museum. An evaluation of the program found significant increases among intervention girls (and not comparison girls) on measures of racial identity, awareness of racism, and endorsement of Africentric values.

Africentric programs for children and youth often (1) use African proverbs and symbolism to relate to contemporary issues (e.g., when the cock is drunk, the rooster will come to illustrate the dangers of drugs); (2) use Black adults as respected elders so youth participants can practice showing respect for elders; (3) educate participants about African and African American culture and history; and (4) use Rites of Passage rituals to formally recognize transitions from childhood to adolescence and transitions from adolescence to adulthood (e.g., a naming ceremony that bestows the child with an African name to symbolize what the child is like and can become) (Cherry et al., 1998). These programs are often used in conjunction with programs that seek to increase racial identity. African-centered programs have shown improvement among participants in several areas, including improved grades (Gordon et al., 2009; Whaley & McQueen, 2020), increased family communication (Caldwell et al., 2010), increased drug use refusal efficacy (Belgrave et al., 2004), decreased drug use and decreased sexual risk (Ferguson, 1998), increased self-esteem (Harvey & Hill, 2004), and increased ethnic identity (Lewis et al., 2012).

African-Centered Programs for Adults

Only a few African-centered programs for adults could be identified. Lateef and colleagues (2021) reviewed African-centered therapeutic interventions with African American adults. They identified six studies that included African American adults in the sample

and used an intervention strategy described as African-centered, Afrocentric, or was based on the principles of an African cultural worldview. The overall findings from these six studies revealed that African-centered approaches showed effectiveness for various outcomes, including mental health, recidivism, and decreased substance abuse. Lateef et al. (2021) noted that the African-centered approaches seemed most beneficial in reducing mental health problems such as depression and emotional regulation. For example, a study by Tillis (2016) showed that among 45 participants who received Africentric-based therapeutic intervention, there was a decrease in depressive symptoms.

Nobles and Goddard's Healer Women Fighting Disease (HWFD) Integrated Substance Abuse and HIV Prevention Program for Black Women (Nobles et al., 2009) used African philosophy for framing and delivering HIV and substance abuse intervention activities. This program assumes that dysfunctional behavior among Black women can be corrected through culturalization, which involves cultural realignment, cognitive restructuring, and character refinement. An example of cultural realignment might be a shift from an individualistic value of personal responsibility to a collective value of collective and mutual responsibility. Cognitive restructuring involves changing how one thinks about one's self in relation to the world that one lives in. Character refinement allows the person to develop her character by following what is natural.

The HWFD program has four core components: (a) the African-Centered Behavioral Change HIV/AIDS & Substance Abuse Prevention Curriculum; (b) the Zola Ngolo Healing Ritual; (c) the Self-Healing Practice: Loving Oneself; and (d) Journaling. The intervention is delivered by trained women supported by a licensed mental health professional. Sixteen sessions are carried out in two-hour modules. An evaluation of 149 women who participated in the intervention group and the comparison group revealed significant changes for intervention participants in cultural realignment (e.g., increasing motivation, decreasing depression), cognitive restructuring (e.g., increasing HIV knowledge and self-worth), and character development (e.g., adopting less risky sexual behaviors).

Although the research on African-centered programs remains limited, studies reviewed suggest positive benefits of using Africentric principles and approaches to inform the structure and content of interventions and programs.

Critical Analysis

This critical analysis discusses issues related to conceptualizing, understanding, and using African-centered psychology. We also discuss the Africentric worldview, programs, and practices based on the Africentric worldview and ways of conducting Africentric research. African-centered psychology is based on African philosophy, and there has been limited research on this topic. This research has been conducted mainly by African American psychologists and, more recently, by African scholars. Unfortunately, the amount of research on this topic has remained static and has not increased over the previous decade. Similarly, there is limited work on African psychology conducted by scholars in other countries with people of African descent (e.g., Caribbean countries) (Sutherland, 2013), and this remains a concern (Mpofu, 2002). Mpofu challenged us to think of ways Western psychology can learn from African psychology. For example, research conducted in Africa may be fruitful in helping us understand how African-centered approaches can be used with African Americans in the United States. In deepening our understanding of African Americans

through an African-centered lens, we must appreciate the complexity of both the continental and the American experience. The consideration of universal, regional, and ethnic variations across the continent, the historical and contemporary role of the colonial experience on the continent, and the differences between majority and minority experiences as social groups may further our understanding of complex influences on the psychology of African Americans. We also raised the issue of the limited scholarly research on the Africentric worldview. While there has been criticism of using Western research methods to study people of African descent, there remains limited research grounded in an Africentric perspective.

Although there has been some theoretical and conceptual discussion of the Africentric worldview, there is a need to elucidate better how this worldview is manifested among contemporary Blacks. In reviewing the literature for this chapter, we could identify only a few published studies that have found differences in Africentric worldview dimensions among African Americans, Whites, and other ethnic groups. This is not to say that these differences do not exist, but this is an empirical question that needs to be addressed. For example, Oyserman et al. (2002) found that African Americans scored higher on certain aspects of individualism than Whites and members of other ethnic groups. This would seem counterintuitive, and a closer look at what individualism and collectivism mean to African Americans might be instructive for future research. Similarly on the continent, counterintuitive findings were found among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria in which study participants were more likely to define happiness by focusing on the self rather than others, contrary to a collective framework (Agbo & Ome, 2017). Although we do not encourage comparative studies between African Americans and other ethnic groups, more research is needed to elucidate how African Americans' Africentric worldview values are manifested.

As we further explore the Africentric worldview, we have the benefit of access to many measures. We can use these measures to deepen our understanding, noting the relevant construct or dimension of focus with specificity. These measures help us clarify whether what we believe or do is most important to our well-being and is most relevant to our intervention efforts. How are cognitive factors such as worldview, values, and beliefs relevant to life course outcomes? Are these cognitive factors more important than behavioral indices, attitudes about cultural group membership, individual ethnic identity, or cultural practices? How do measures of context, as opposed to social and relational preferences, inform our work? Notably, the measures of Africentric worldview are often developed using Western methods of survey development in contrast to methods that an African-centered worldview would use (Goings et al., 2023; Semaj, 1996). Further consideration of how to use African centered perspectives in research is discussed in a paper by Goings and colleagues on how to conduct antiracist research (Goings et al., 2023).

We have begun to see authors encourage Africentric programming (Awosogba et al., 2023; Gilbert et al., 2009; Lateef et al., 2021; Nobles, 2015). These scholars have advocated using an Africentric framework as a best practice for programs and interventions with Blacks. However, there needs to be more published work on the efficacy of Africentric approaches, and most of these programs have targeted youth. This includes research on what additional benefits (if any) do participants gain when implementing programs using an Africentric framework?

Assuming that using Africentric principles in programming is more effective than not, a different question is how do we infuse this in our programs? For example, what

would a reading program look like for African Americans if it used an Africentric framework? How would clinical treatment incorporate an Africentric framework with a depressed African American adult male? While the work of Boykin et al. (2006) (e.g., rhythm and verve and collective orientation among children) and Wade Nobles has addressed these questions, additional research is needed. Although some scholars have identified core features of an Africentric approach, are there other aspects that should be attended to in programs? Evaluations of the effectiveness of these programs would lend support (or lack of) for the Africentric framework. If programs with an Africentric framework produce better outcomes for Blacks than those that do not use this framework, then we would have evidence that this framework is more helpful in understanding the psychology of Blacks.

Another important consideration is how we obtain knowledge and understanding about Blacks. Most studies cited in this chapter used Western methods to gather information. Most of these studies have been conducted using paper-and-pencil surveys or questionnaires. However, as noted, the nature of knowledge acquisition might differ for African people. For example, from an Africentric framework, sages (elderly and wise people in the community) are often the source of knowledge and truth, not data generated from a questionnaire. Qualitative and ethnographic research methods, methodologies typically not used in psychology, are encouraged.

In addition, exploring the regional, historical, and cultural variability within and across the diverse Black experience may also support a richer understanding by avoiding assumptions of the monolithic nature of the Black community. How do we understand the commonality and uniqueness of the African worldview of a 14-year-old Jamaican American in Flatbush, a 60-year-old African American man in Tulsa, a 30-year-old Somali refugee in San Diego, and a 75-year-old Black woman in Birmingham?

Many African-centered theorists and researchers have contrasted an Africentric view with a Eurocentric view for illustrative purposes. At the same time, there are similarities and differences among all cultural and ethnic groups. Research that compares and contrasts the worldview of people of African descent with the worldview of other ethnic and cultural groups (Asian, Latino, and Middle Eastern) would be informative.

In terms of future work, there is much left to do. This includes more theoretical work examining Africentric constructs, understanding how African-centered values function in the lives of Blacks, and using culturally congruent methods for gathering data.

Summary

The proverb at the beginning of this chapter, “Wood may remain ten years in the water, but it will never become a crocodile,” conveys the idea that although time and conditions change, the core features of the person will remain the same. This is true of persons of African ancestry living in America.

The Africentric worldview is found among most people of African descent. A worldview consists of the values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of people. African American psychologists began to write about the Africentric worldview in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Several psychologists have advanced our understanding of the Africentric worldview. Joseph White, Asa Hilliard, Na'im Akbar, Wade Nobles, Kobi Kamfon, Linda James Myers, and Cheryl Grills are among them. Much of the work on African-centered psychology has been published in the *Journal of Black Psychology*.

The Africentric worldview is characterized by several dimensions that differ from the Eurocentric worldview. Although there is a great deal of diversity among African Americans, the following dimensions are assumed to exist among most people of African descent to some degree: spirituality, collectiveness, flexible and past time orientation, orality, sensitivity to the emotional and affective state of others, verve and rhythm, and an orientation toward balance and harmony. Grills (2004) identified other concepts relevant to understanding African psychology: *ma'at*, *maafa*, veneration of the person, spiritness, human authenticity, and Sankofa. Several conditions helped Africans maintain African values and traditions in the New World.

African-centered research has examined cultural preferences and practices among African Americans based on Africentric dimensions and the relationship between Africentric dimensions and other psychological and social variables. Several measures have been developed to assess Africentric worldview dimensions. Research on best practices suggests that programs that use an Africentric framework promote better psychosocial outcomes among African American youth and adults than those that do not. Although there has been promising work in understanding the Africentric worldview, there is much more work to do.