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Black Psychology

Fourth Edition

**Edited By
Reginald L. Jones**

**Cobb & Henry • Publishers
Hampton VA**

African Psychology

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Introduction

In a well-known Akan tale, Ananse the spider once accumulated all wisdom and stashed it in a calabash on his head. Ananse climbed a palm tree and as he approached the top, he lost his hold on wisdom. The calabash fell and wisdom scattered everywhere. The lesson: bits of wisdom are everywhere. No one, however clever, can monopolize all knowledge. No worldview, no matter how clever, can monopolize all knowledge or all knowledge within a specific discipline. So why does the Eurocentric paradigm of human behavior monopolize the science of psychology? What wisdom does Africa offer in the quest to understand what it means to be human?

Traditional African psychology, found within the healing art and science of traditional African medicine, is a solid amalgamation of dynamic know-how and ancestral experience. It is the sum of practices, measures, ingredients, and procedures of all kinds, whether explicable or grounded in practical experience and observation, handed down from generation-to-generation verbally or in writing (World Health Organization, 1978). From time immemorial it has enabled Africans to promote wellness and harmony among the individual, community, nature and cosmogony. African psychology incorporates several fundamental concepts. They include African:

- Worldview (or *utamawazo*)¹ and corresponding metaphysical basis of psychology and African science;
- Concepts of consciousness;
- Conceptualizations of the person and human beingness;
- Concepts of health and illness; and
- Models of the healing exchange or process.

The following discussion presents an overview of African psychology beginning with the issue of definition. What exactly is African psychology and what are the rudiments of this paradigm? Given that African culture is grounded in its ontological understanding of the world, a brief overview of African cosmology, particularly as it relates to conceptions of God and the essential nature of things animate and inanimate is presented. Such an understanding is central in

African theories of human behavior and the psyche. With the above foundation, an articulation of two key features of human psychological and behavioral functioning are presented. First an African concept of the human being including the essential elements of the self is presented using the Akan schema as an illustrative case in point. This is followed by a discussion of an African-centered conceptualization of consciousness. Much of what is presented in this chapter on African psychology is based on ten years of field research in West Africa and the results of a study on African concepts of consciousness conducted in Ghana and Nigeria in 1999-2000.

Defining African Psychology

What is African psychology? At the forefront of contemporary discussion on African psychology is the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi). The African Psychology Institute (API), whose origins can be traced to the 1979 Atlanta Summit on African Psychology, first articulated the parameters of an African psychology paradigm in its African Psychology Institute Training Module Handbook (1982). These early ideas were subsequently refined by the current members of the API culminating in The Association's adoption of the following definition of African-centered psychology.

"African-Centered Psychology is the dynamic manifestation of unifying African principles, values and traditions. It is the self-conscious centering of psychological analysis and applications in African reality, culture and epistemology. African-Centered Psychology examines the process that allows for the illumination and liberation of the spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence, African-Centered psychology recognizes: the Spirit that permeates everything that is; the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected; the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence; and the idea that communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health. African-Centered psychology is ultimately concerned with understanding the systems of meaning of human beingness, the features of human functioning, and the restoration of normal/natural order to human development. As such, it is used to resolve personal and social problems and to promote optimal functioning (African Psychology Institute, 1995)."

Consistent with ABPsi's definition, African psychology is concerned with defining African psychological experiences from an African perspective, a perspective that reflects an African orientation to the meaning of life, the world, and relationships with others and one's self. The resulting paradigm contains distinctly African values, ways of accessing knowledge, ways of defining reality, ways of governing and interpreting behavior, social relations, and designing

environments to sustain healthy, adaptive development and functioning. Its origins can be traced to that point in time when Blacks of Africa produced an organized system of knowledge (philosophy, definitions, concepts, models, procedures, and practices) concerning the nature of the social universe from the perspective of African cosmology (Azibo, 1996).

This African-centered perspective is not restricted to a specific African ethnocultural group but rather reflects a basic historical continuity, historical consciousness, and cultural unity (Obenga, 1997). As an expression of African culture, African psychology offers a deeper understanding of things African and what it means to be African. In fact, it has been argued that matters that fall within the purview of psychology are among the most critical tasks facing today's African-centered scholars.

"The yeoman's task for the present and forthcoming generations of African scholars is to penetrate the depths of African history and culture in an attempt to not only understand and describe but to analyze how African people explain themselves. The explanations that human beings provide of themselves are inextricably linked to the concept of culture (Obenga, 1997)."

The ancient Kemites took this point a step further by stating, "we have nothing to discover outside ourselves" (Schwaller de Lubicz, 1998). Their philosophical worldview allows us to understand the African value placed on understanding human beings and cosmological issues.

"There exists in us a unifying link that rationalism cannot explain, that quantitative, equational logic cannot grasp. This link enables us to see an object as a single image observed from different angles; to isolate at will different sounds heard simultaneously; to taste, that is, to coordinate flavor and odor; and to comprehend corporeality through touch. This is in no way a reasoned coordination, but a phenomenon of intelligence that resides in the synthesizing milieu, in other words, a faculty for canceling sensorial specifications" (Schwaller de Lubicz, 1998).

As mirror reflections of each other, human beings and the cosmos each provide a window of understanding to the other, if examined from an African epistemological perspective.

African psychology represents an Africentric framework. The Africentric framework is a genre of thought and praxis that is rooted in the cultural image and interest of people of African ancestry. In this framework, the life experiences, history, and traditions of people of African ancestry are at the center of analyses. In other words, the premise is to examine or analyze phenomena with a lens consistent with an African understanding of reality; African values; African logic; African methods of knowing and African historical experiences. This perspective

is informed and guided by the African *utamawazo* (reality or worldview) (See Ani, 1994 for more detailed discussion).

The *utamawazo* of a people provides a lens through which to see the world and a map by which to navigate and negotiate life on life's terms. The major components of worldview are:

- 1) ontology: an orientation to reality with a belief about what is the essential nature of reality;
- 2) axiology: a value orientation—defining the relationship of humans to nature;
- 3) cosmology: the structure of reality and a definition of the relationship to the divine;
- 4) epistemology: a system of truths and a method for revealing or understanding truth or generating knowledge; and,
- 5) praxis: a system of human conduct.

According to Diop's Two Cradle Theory (Wobogo, 1976), the cornerstones of the African worldview are:

- Ancestor Veneration—In Africa ancestors are deified, viewed as part of the cosmology and influence the living daily; closely tied to this is respect for elders who are (along with the young) closest to the world of the ancestors.
- Social Collectivity—Wealth and resources are distributed by need; class stratification is influenced by clan grouping; therefore lines are less rigid. We is most important.
- Humanity is a part of nature and part of Earth's fauna.
- The Universe is essentially spirit manifested in matter, contributing to the view of oneness with the Universe and subjectivity in epistemology. Truth, derived through this epistemology is revealed through the language of symbols, nature, the cosmos, and the human being. Phenomena in nature become forms of speech allowing nature to reveal the esoteric (immanent meaning that is implied but may be inexpressible in words) and exoteric (manifest, material, functional aspect of an object or principle). As we shall see later, these components are evident throughout African psychological theory.

In the African worldview, the person and community adopt a teleological (attention to purpose) orientation to existence and are equipped with "patterns for interpreting reality" and a "general design for living" (Nobles, 1986). They are

informed in the world in ways not limited to intellect, conscious mind, or physical senses. In Kemet, it was believed that "The mind is constrictive, it narrows what we experience or observe into an image. Emotion dilates the emotional sense (and not the emotion which is a result) is a radiating substance" (Schwaller de Lubicz, 1998). In other words, the affective sensorium becomes a major conduit of information and illumination. The ancient Kemites and contemporary traditional healers in Africa, recognize that this dilating emotional intelligence can "open our eyes" to an altogether different way of thinking and acting that no longer excludes direct knowing, and that needs no physical or descriptive intermediary. Here the mechanism of intuition resides. This faculty can be cultivated to the point of enabling the communication of thought without the usual verbal and nonverbal media.

These essential principles of the African worldview contribute to the ideological cornerstones of African psychology. In African life, they ground the person and community in an appreciation of and relationship to: Mind/ soul/ spirit, spiritual transformation, life, death, resurrection and after-life, ancestralhood, creation, universal order, will, thought, speech, memory, learning, human development, virtuous living, optimal functioning, behavior causation, and self-consciousness. Herein lies the grist for the contemporary re-articulation of an African psychology. How do we draw upon these principles to articulate a contemporary psychological paradigm that resonates with the psychological reality of diasporan African people? How do we draw upon these concepts to design a model of human behavior that promotes the well-being and development of African people?

Ideologically, ABPsi has suggested that African psychology is anchored in the concepts of (1) *Ma'at*, (2) the *maafa*,² (3) veneration of the person, (4) spiritness, and (5) human authenticity (ABPsi National HIV/STD Technical Assistance Project, 1998). To these I would add (6) inclusive metaphysical epistemology, (7) dynamic interdependence of community, nature and spirit, and (8) *sankofa*. These concepts anchor and establish the terrain of African psychology. They shape the African understanding of what it means to be human; what is natural, normal functioning; what drives human development; what prevents and contributes to disease and dysfunction; what promotes and maintains harmonious, functional communities; what promotes restoration and healing; and what provides meaning in life. In other words, they provide the foundation for an African psychology.

Ma'at

Ma'at refers to cosmic order and balance as the cardinal principle governing the dynamic functioning of all aspects of the universe (Kambon, 1999). It is central in any discussion of African psychology. According to the ancestors of ancient Kemet, human behavior and functioning were as much governed by *Ma'at* as by the universe. The *Ma'at*an ideal is grounded in three critical elements: Perpetual

Veneration, Interconnectedness, and Spiritual Oneness. (ABPsi, 1998). Perpetual Veneration is seeing oneself as a representative of a vital part of a supreme system that includes all life everywhere. Each person is an extension, a spark of the divine. Interconnectedness means viewing life as an historical, dynamic, ongoing interconnected process of causality. What I do today is a reflection of yesterday and the impetus for what I, and others, do tomorrow. Spiritual Oneness is acknowledging the spiritual dimensions of the human experience. All beings are an extension of the singular source of creation and so are not only connected to the source but to each other. The seven cardinal virtues of Ma'at (truth, justice, propriety/compassion, harmony, balance, reciprocity, order) and the 42 admonitions are considered to be the keys to human perfectibility. The more they are recognized and practiced in life, the more developed the self becomes. Ma'at provides the guidelines for correct behavior and the standard against which the soul of the deceased is judged.

Concern with ethical behavior, character and values and leading a principled life are central in African culture. As Table 1 illustrates, these principles emphasize the rules by which society maintains harmony, balance, order and predictability. It further reflects the fundamental cosmological beliefs of African people related to the ongoing evolution of the soul and the cultural preoccupation with human welfare and well-being. A principled life is inherently connected to the psychology of African people. Ethical, moral guidelines or rules for healthy well-being are often found in African proverbs, tales, and symbols.

The Maafa

Briefly, *maafa*, (Ani, 1980) refers to "great disaster" and/or widespread destruction. It is used to describe the "African holocaust of violent Eurasian cultural encroachment on Africa and the enslavement of Africans by Eurasians in general" (Kambon, 1999). It is a great disaster designed to dehumanize and/or destroy African people. It is not a single abhorrent event in history, but an ongoing sophisticated, continuous process of physical and psychological bondage that includes the holocaust of African enslavement, colonial rule in Africa, and the many forms of racism practiced against African people in the United States. It represents the systematic and systemic disintegration, dehumanization and negation of the essence of everything African. The critical feature of the *maafa* is "the denial of the validity of African people's humanity," and a collective and ever-present total disregard and disrespect for the African's right to exist (King, Nobles & James, 1995). Kambon (1999) argues that the brutal enslavement of Africans by Europeans was the primary historical trauma that threatened the conscious cultural link between the continental African community and Africans violently relocated in the diaspora. African *maafa* experiences include: being captured for enslavement; captivity in the dungeons peppered along the coastline of Africa; the middle passage; the seasoning process; chattel enslavement among first and subsequent

Table 1
African Centered Cultural Virtues and Value System

Wolof	Akan Ethics	Ancient (Kemetic) "Seven Cardinal Virtues of Maat"	Traditional (Yoruba) "Attributes of Good Character"	Contemporary African-American "Nguzo Saba"
Teranga Sense of Hospitality/ Kindness to the "stranger". The guest is King!	Truth Pae mu se ye fare, nso eye ahodwo	Truth	Patience (SUNRU)	Umoja (Unity)
Kesra Self respect and respect for others Don't act or talk to others in a disrespectful or "hurful" way.	Generosity and Beneficence Obiakole na okum soro ma amanson nlinaa di	Justice	Calmness (IFARABALE)	Kujichagulia (Self Determination)
Yar Politeness and respect, particularly toward your elders	Obedience and Respect Esen w'agya tsanten a, nna nnye wo pen bi a	Righteousness	Teachability (ILUTTI)	Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)
Yemende Being able to have "compassion" for those less fortunate than yourself physically or materially.	Patience Kwan kwar a owie abow ano	Harmony	Sensitivity (MOJI-MORA)	Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)
Mandu Appreciative of what you have and not be envious of others.	Justice Abowa a onny dua Nyame na Opra no ho	Balance	Endurance (TITTI)	Nia (Purpose)
JU'PUJUB Good character. Be just, honest, righteous.	Strong Character Edze nnyekyer aye ahuntuma, na eben ndua na edze bogu no mpar	Propriety	Insight (OJU-INU)	Kuumba (Creativity)
Jom Sense of honor/self respect and willingness to do whatever it takes to achieve (within family/ community)	Goodness of Human Nature Eye papa a, eye ma wo ho	Order	Originality (OJU-ONA)	Imani (Faith)

finally got his turn to speak with God. Perturbed, he asked God, why did you let me die? God bellowed, "because you chose to be that which you are not". The moral of this African tale is authenticity, being that which you are. To do so is essential to life. For African people, an African psychology sustains, restores and reconstructs authentic African lives, communities, realities, and destinies. Greater still, an African psychology contributes to the search for meaning and expression of the "authentic core which gives one a sense of essence and drives proper response to the demands of experiencing life" (Nobles, 1998).

Authenticity refers to the condition or quality of being "genuine". To be "genuine" means one is original and free from distortion, mutation, or imitation. It means generating the "you" in the esoteric (the all of existence). To be authentic is to be real and indisputably connected to that which brought you into existence (Nobles, 1998). At the core of questions of authenticity are definitions of human reality and issues of power over who, or what, worldview determine that reality. For diasporan Africans, to be authentic is to recognize our connection to our African origin and that which brought us into existence. In the absence of authenticity comes threat to survival and frustration in the fulfillment of one's destiny. To be African or not to be (Hilliard, 1997) is the question posed. What does it mean to be authentic in the governance of day-to-day behavior? What does an authentic African do, think, feel, experience, intuit, believe and trust? What are the degrees of inauthentic existence and what are the psychological and health manifestations of these states? How do we establish authenticity and how can it be sustained? These are but a few of the questions with which African psychology must grapple in the articulation of its contemporary paradigm.

Inclusive Metaphysical Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the method of knowing or coming to an understanding of reality, of what is real (Kamfon, 1999). This understanding reflects the particular racial-cultural perspective and experience of a group and differs from culture to culture. An African epistemology emphasizes an affective-cognitive synthesis as a way of knowing reality. This reality does not limit itself to the five senses and rational logic as the only means for securing information and understanding. This method of knowing is also multidisciplinary in the scope of its purview. Knowing is not limited to linear reasoning. Knowing is not bound by space, time, the senses, cognition, and tangible verification or control of that which is known. The spiritual basis of all there is to know makes African epistemology metaphysical. In the pursuit of knowledge, the African willingness to engage and include that which is empirically, tangibly verifiable and that which is not, make this an inclusive epistemology. The material world is not taken as the end of it all. Our mental fascination with the tangible object shuts the door to an identification that would bring us knowledge of what is evident in that which we observe (Schwaller de

Lubicz, 1998). Schwaller de Lubicz (1998) noted that this inclusive epistemology is concerned with the esoteric (the inner meaning, the implied but inexpressible in words) aspects of any given stimulus or phenomenon. A cerebral approach to knowledge leaves parts isolated from each other whereas the esoteric approach aims for synthesis and an appreciation for the simultaneity of complements ("...when we look to the front, we feel that there is a behind. We cannot look in one direction without opposing to it a complementary pole, and although this pole is not sensorially observed, the awareness of it exists within us"). (Schwaller de Lubicz, 1998).

Dynamic Interdependence of Person, Community, Nature and Spirit

In the African world there is no "I" without a "We." In fact, in several African languages there is no term for the English equivalent "I" and me is infrequently used. This characteristic of African languages exposes a value placed on the "we" over the "I". As Mbiti (1990) noted, in the African view, "To be human is to belong to the whole community." The whole is represented in the individual, and the individual stands for the whole community (Sundermeier, 1998). For example, the Zulus refer to this as "*Nginguzulu*" which means both "I am a Zulu" and "I am the Zulu people." Individuals exist because of the community and the community is responsible for the conduct of its individual members and a wrong done to the individual is a wrong inflicted upon his/her entire community (Kamalu, 1990). In this African schema, the corporate or collective reality predominates.

This philosophy of interdependence or collectivism guides not only individual action in relation to the group but extends to a corporate moral responsibility as well. The actions of the individual are understood to have consequences for the community; a community which consists of the living, the deceased and the unborn (Kamalu, 1990). This is why it is common to hear the saying, the "sins of the parents will be meted against the children." The consequences might also extend to the community. In Zaïre, after an unsuccessful hunt, the community might ask where is there discord in the community, try to find out who is the cause of it, and by extension, who is the cause of the unsuccessful hunt (Forde, 1963). The society operates from the vantage point that the interests of the community take precedence over those of the individual and participation in the society is a defining feature of this interdependence. This participation does not allow domination and exploitation of the world, but demands adaptation to the whole (Sundermeier, 1998). Fanon (1967) reflected this cultural viewpoint when he stated: "I cannot dissociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother. Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man."

The value of interdependence serves several functions: survival, definitions of self and role, fulfillment of destiny, and providing meaning and order in life. Finally, this sense of interdependence is not restricted to one's family or immediate

community, clan or nation. It extends to the interdependence that is believed and maintained with the departed ancestors, nature and the realm of spirit. Interdependence, then, expresses the African concept of "consubstantial existence" (Taylor, 1963); that is, *I am because we are* (Mbiti, 1990).

Sankofa

Sankofa is an Akan Adinkra symbol, which signifies "the ability to utilize one's historical past and traditions in order to go forward into the future." Sankofa's literal meaning is that "one must go back and fetch in order to go forward." According to the principle of Sankofa, there is no harm in going to get something that you owned, but lost. In Akan culture, one can always return to the original source in order to remedy an error. Its contemporary meaning is that a people should use the best of their past to guide them into the future. Sankofa means returning to the source of African culture, heritage, and identity, yielding to the power within as we move into the future. Rituals may be periodically performed in some African cultures to restore traditions that are thought to be weakening. By becoming weakened, these traditions weaken the order, balance and health of the community. For example, if the Herero perceive that the *okavuvu*, their ancestral fire, has become tired and lost its power, they will assemble at the burial sites of the departed and "rekindle" the flames. "The time of the ancestors becomes the present through the pilgrimage and feast; more precisely, the present is projected back into the time of the ancestors, and thus empowered. The ritual, while referring to the past, speaks to the people now." (Sundermeier, 1998).

The philosophy, experiences, and wisdom Africa has to offer are encoded in her symbols, rituals, art, music, dance, proverbs, riddles, traditions, social structures, poetry, spiritual beliefs, architecture, technology, science, medicine, and oral traditions. Africa is rich in creativity and resources. In doing Sankofa, Africa's profundity and wisdom are revealed.

Kambon (1999) and others (Ajamu, 1997; Akbar, 1994; Grills & Rowe, 1997; Hilliard, 1998; Nobles, 1998) assert that the African-centered perspective of African/Black Psychology is the only "culturally" authentic perspective for African people. In applying African psychology to the understanding and welfare of continental and diasporan Africans, one is simply practicing the principle of Sankofa in the best interest of the people.

African Cosmology

An understanding of African psychology is impossible in the absence of a basic understanding of African cosmology. African cosmological beliefs tend not to be concerned with personal salvation. Rather, the focus tends to be on self-

Table 2
African Appellations for the Supreme Being

Name	Ethnic Group	Translation
Onyame	Akan	The Supreme Being; God; Creator of all things
Olodumare	Yoruba	Owner of odu (all knowledge) manifested
Amma	Dogon	To embrace strongly, to hold firmly; to pronounce the name Amma means to preserve all space
Meketa	Kono	The One who remains and does not die, the Everlasting One
Se	Ewe	The Supreme God
Montshi	Tswana	Midwife; enabler, the one who enables us to come out; Giver
Chukwu	Igbo	The great, universal, all-pervading and all inclusive chi (spirit)
Faah	Kemite	Primeval father, Creator of the world conceived of His heart and uttered into reality by His tongue through the power of the Word

realization through participation in the socio-cosmic web of relationships established by God, the Supreme Being and agents of God. The goal of human existence is to maintain the divinely established order and maintain the transcendental structures which sustain normality, not to escape them or view them as evil, profane or illusory (Cavendish, 1994). Faith in the Creator is more akin to a sense of total trust rather than the Christian sense of belief. As shown in Table 2, the Supreme Being is known by various names revealing the people's understanding of His role in the creation of the world and life.

The African cosmos is a pyramid of spiritual forces governing the world. These forces flow from and are an expression of the Supreme Being. They can affect specific localities, clans, streams, trees or objects. While each force may be invoked separately, they are not independent entities. All are merely reflections of the Supreme God.

Supporting Diop's initial thesis of the cultural unity of Africa, one can find several basic concepts reflected across different African spiritual systems (Cavendish, 1994). In fact, Sundermeier (1998) stated "The more deeply you enter into African spirituality, and understand the ethnic and social basis for the way Africans cope with the world, the more, it seems to me, you are justified in talking

of African religion in the singular, as does D. Zahan, whose special field was the Bambara of Mali. Even if I do not share this view, the structural similarity never ceases to amaze me."

Among the fundamental tenets of all African spiritual systems is a belief in a Supreme Being who created the world and who presides over the destiny of humankind. The world is peopled by living humans, spirits who may be enshrined in natural phenomena, and the ancestors. There is no final death but an active life that continues after the transition from the material world of humankind. The affairs of the mundane, day-to-day existence of human beings, tends to be more the concern of the ancestors and representatives of the Supreme Being. The deities are charged with the responsibility of maintaining the order established by the Creator and the ancestors with completing a process of personal and familial spiritual evolution. Related to the belief in different levels of spiritual power, there is also a belief in the vital force that may be inherent in some material things (e.g., a rock, a tree, an amulet). These materials may be used to harness the vital force of different deities, act as a vehicle of communication with the unseen, or act as agents of change as seen in the healing process. Powerful "ase" can be packed in the horns of particular animals with particular powers attached to their natures (Makinde, 1988). The plant and animal substances used for "ase" require that one understands the inherent nature of these substances as well as their possible effect on human beings, disease, and illness. For example, a Yoruba priest (male babalawo or female iyanifa) might use ingredients such as the tail of a big rat (the *iru* okete) and a chameleon (alegemo) along with certain medicinal plants to pack the inside of the horn of a ram that will be used for some medicinal purpose. Why the tail of the rat? In digging a hole for its habitation the rat does so effortlessly using its tail as if it commands the earth to open up. As for the chameleon, it has the ability to change its colors at will reflecting the principle of adaptation. The babalawo touches the horn packed and sealed with various substances inside and recites what he wants to happen. He then invokes the natural power of each of the elements inside relating them to the healing or intervention that is needed on behalf of the patient (Makinde, 1988).

Another basic structure that runs through all African spiritual systems is the creation and use of symbols. To understand the significance of symbols one must understand that in the African world:

- Reality precedes thought and perception;
- Thought comprehends reality symbolically;
- Symbols reveal that which is latent and immaterial;
- Human beings are the source, origin, and reference point of symbols;
- Everything can symbolize the body and the body can symbolize everything else;

• Human beings are themselves part of the symbols they perceive. The world is not the object communicating itself to the subject because the subject is never separated from the object;

- Symbols make visible the powers that belong together;
- Different interpretations of the same symbol are not mutually exclusive;
- Symbols are activated in word or ritual;
- The branches of a tree develop in the image of its roots—the roots evoke the branches just as the symbol evokes its idea or reality; and
- Symbols can be found in many forms including the way in which a village or home is designed and how things are spatially related or configured.

Clearly related to symbols is the African understanding of language and the power of the word (Makinde, 1988). For example, the Dogon speak of *nommo* (power of the spoken word and the name of a deity), *so dayi* (clear speech and one of the levels of initiation) and *anga ti*, (words of the mouth that activate things like herbs and objects). The Yoruba speak of *ofo ase*, the ancient Kemites of the *medew netcher*. "The word does not become the key to unlock existence because of its rational and external nature, but because of its power" (Sundermeier, 1998). Further, naming things is more than an aesthetic, rational or creative act. A name reveals what in fact is there. For example, in the Yoruba language, there is often a direct relationship between the name of a plant and the plant's qualities. In a Yoruba prayer the *tete* leaves are used to find a place to rest. *Te* means rest. The *gbegebe* leaves are used to find a place to live. *Gbe* means place. *Oja* leaves are used to break up a cough. *Ja* means cough. For incantations (called *ofo*) used in the application of medicines, there is typically an "activating" verb which vitalizes the medicine rendering it potent and capable of healing. The spoken transmission of this knowledge, contained within the word, is considered the vehicle of the power (*ase*). The word is powerful because it participates in reality.

African Concepts of the Human Being

African concepts of human beingness, along with other African cultural constructs, should play a major role in the advancement of African psychology in the 21st century. African conceptualizations of the person/self hold promise for informing our understanding of adaptive, authentic human functioning and can contribute to the development of models of health promotion, disease prevention and tertiary intervention among Africans throughout the diaspora. African conceptualizations have the capacity to:

- Make significant contributions to the emerging paradigm of African-centered psychology;
- Redefine and expand the limited purview of human experience and expression represented in Western psychology paradigms;
- Contribute to the application of African-centered psychology as a force for personal and social liberation—liberation psychology for actualization of self and community potential; and
- Reveal that which is African psychology through the systematic investigation of traditional African cultural, spiritual and medical beliefs and practices.

The Concept of Self

The concept of self has been revisited as a vehicle capable of providing a comprehensive understanding of human behavior, ideally and cross-culturally (Johnson, 1985). Geertz (1975/1984) aptly observed that "The Western conception is a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures." This is due in part to the tendency of Western conceptualizations to ignore all cultural perspectives but the Eurocentric worldview. Marsella (1985) argued that the cultural perspective must be considered.

"Psychiatry, psychology, and cultural anthropology must begin first and foremost with an understanding of the nature of human experience. This requires a knowledge of the self. The self is tied to culture and culture varies across the world. We need to introduce these valuable dimensions into Western psychiatric thought and practice" (Marsella, 1985).

Concepts of self (or the person) will differ cross-culturally (Marsella, 1985). Psychology has begun to attend to cultural differences in the expression of human reality and behavior with a particular focus on various Asian, Indian, and Native American cultures. Far less discourse has occurred about the expansive body of knowledge contained in African concepts of the person. When discussed, albeit infrequently, African concepts of self have typically been examined from the vantage point of disciplines other than psychology (for example, anthropology, philosophy, and theology). Africa has much to offer and much yet to reveal on the subject and its relevance to psychology.

What constitutes the self and what distinctions can be made about self as object, self as process, and self as essence. Self as object refers to the definition of self in terms of its incorporated elements and organization. Self as process refers to being influenced by a culture's epistemological system a process by which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. Self as essence addresses self as an extension of ultimate reality.

In Eurocentric social, personality, developmental and clinical psychology, the study of self has focused on concepts of personality and human development. Scholars in cross-cultural psychology are exploring less restrictive individualistic models, looking at how self is defined and how it operates across cultures (See Landrine, 1992). Cross-cultural conceptualizations recognize that self and culture are reciprocally related phenomena. In fact, Hsu (1985) contends that an understanding of how self is defined in different cultures provides the basic means for understanding the secrets of social and cultural stability. In other words, "In its extensiveness, the concept may help reduce the gap between epistemological theory building and the complex phenomenal events which are explained by the theories" (Johnson, 1985). For example, in Hindu concepts of the self, ego, a central construct in Western psychology, comes at the end of a chain of spiritual and personal ancestry (Bharati, 1985). Likewise, African conceptualizations tend to reflect the centrality of spiritual, ancestral and communal elements of self (Ackah, 1988; Ani, 1980; Ayim-Aboagye, 1993; Barrett, 1974; Ephirim-Donkor, 1997; Finch, 1998; Grills & Rowe, 1998; Gyekye, 1987; Nobles, 1986 & 1998; Opopku, 1978; Wiredu, 1992).

The African Concept of Self

African systems of spiritual, medical, and philosophical thought offer an untapped reservoir of organic wisdom regarding the nature, components, processes, and functions of various elements of human beingness and levels of human consciousness. The elements of human beingness represent both material and immaterial substance. These substances are in a dynamic relationship with one another. These dynamic relationships are brought to the surface in the context of African systems of traditional/indigenous healing. Using Akan concepts as a case in point, the African concept of the person illustrated in Figure 1 embodies several features of this conceptualization.⁴

The model of the atom at the turn of the century is used here to illustrate the dynamic relationship between critical components of the self and the implied levels of conscious awareness. When first developed, the old model of the atom was meant to illustrate how electrons orbit an atom. It was never an adequate explanation of this process and is no longer used but it provided a useful heuristic for portraying energy fields and the relationship of different energy fields to the atom's nucleus, which in the African conceptualization is the core of the individual self.

In the model, a "cloud" of electrons surrounds the atom. The farther from the nucleus, the lower is the density and the weaker the integrity, and conscious capacity of the molecule (the self). The nucleus consists of essence that is spirit/soul and expression or manifestation which is the body (*nipaada*) and breath (*honhom*). Orbiting around this nucleus of the self is:

An African Concept of Self

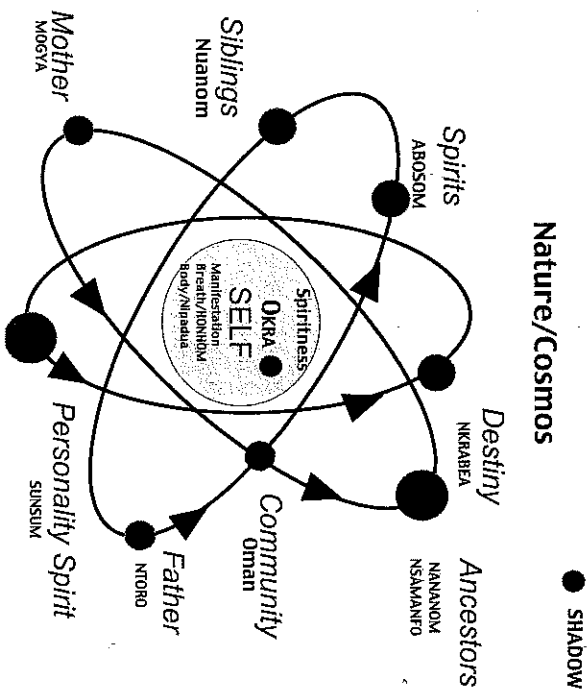


Figure 1. African concept of self.

- Energy expressed as the soul providing a direct connection to the source of life and ultimate consciousness (*the okra*);
- A destiny which can act as a homing device orienting the individual to his/her purpose in life and imbued with the capacity to influence consciousness (*nkraabea*);
- A personality soul (*sunsun*) which is in ontological unity with *okra*. It is also the governor of tibia (the animal in your head) which may be translated as conscience;
- A shadow or personal double that remains in the spiritual realm while the physical self manifests in the physical world;
- Spirits or deities (*abosom*);
- The person's ancestors (*nananom nsamanto*);
- Formative, guiding and protective energy of the father and his clan's spiritual guardians (*ntoro*);
- The ancestral blood (*mogya*) line which provides a container for the *okra* and the spiritual connection to the maternal ancestor lineage (*abusia*);

African Psychology

- A community (*oman*) and siblings (*nuanom*) providing a context of meaning, values, rules and roles; and
- Nature (*abode*) and the cosmos (*wikase aor abode de nyina*) providing the ultimate environment within which the person and his/her community are in constant dynamic interaction.

The objective of this model is to illustrate the dynamic interactions of the components and mechanisms that constitute the person and his/her consciousness. The closer the energy components vibrate in relationship to the nucleus (a condition of coherence in the self and awareness by the self of its essence and expression), the greater the health and integrity of the nucleus self. Under conditions of congruence, the self can more readily access, engage, manipulate, and utilize the various realms of consciousness within its capacity. For example, think of the last time you experienced an 'intuition' inspiring you to do something, avoid something, be cautious about something and you ignored it only to find out that this prescient idea was accurate. By ignoring it, unnecessary consequences followed. The source of this 'intuition' may have been your ancestors, your *ntoro*'s divinities, the *abosom*, or your own *sunsun*—personal spirit guardian. To continually ignore them is to cut yourself off from your own inherent mechanisms for understanding and navigating the world. The more attuned one is to the multiple sources of insight, the multiple factors that contribute to an integrated self, the greater one's capacity to live effectively.

The symbol of the atom is used to illustrate the various components that constitute the core of the human being. The strength or integrity of this core is dependent upon the dynamic, vital and harmonious interaction between the constituent elements that provide further definition and meaning to human beingness. When the components are aligned and the conscious self is attuned to these components, the person experiences *alafia* (well being and good health). The various elements that "orbit" the core consciously aware self are necessary to its balance and survival. This is true for both material and immaterial elements as the self forms connections (bonds) with other selves and elements. The self, like the atom, acts like an electromagnetic field drawing other elements to it. In other words, the healthy person has an affinity for connecting with others. To be viable (healthy), she/he must bond with and be connected to others. This adds a new dimension to the African cultural precept of communalism.

It is useful, at this juncture, to elaborate further on the components of self in the Akan schema. These essential elements require further investigation as we develop the African psychology paradigm.

Okra. *Okra* is the life source, life generating soul. Some of its nature is derived from the spiritual processes governing the day on which the

Nkrabea. The literal translation of *nkrabea* is the manner in which a soul bids farewell to *Oryame* before it departs for the world. God gives one his/her *nkrabea* (destiny) and no one knows it or can change it but God. "*Nkrabea mu nni kwaiabea*." (The destiny God has assigned you cannot be avoided). *Nkrabea* is the individual's personalized content, meaning and purpose in life. It represents the fact that there is a purpose for being born and being born into a certain set of life circumstances. *Nkrabea* brings a sense of duty and mission that must be accomplished existentially. Failure to fulfill this can necessitate reincarnation. While African culture is essentially communal, there is a simultaneous recognition of the work the individual must attend to in their destiny. What does Ayim-Aboagye (1993) mean that although individualistic, the purpose of being, *nkrabea*, does not exist in isolation but in relation to the *marikɔn* and ancestors? How does *suban bon* (bad character) affect "good destiny"? How does the *dzen* (name given to the person associated with the day of the week on which they are born) and the *kraɔzen* (the person's soul name) relate to and influence the *nkrabea*?¹² What are the characteristics of the seven *dzen* and how do they affect *nkrabea* and personality? How is self-made conscious of the misalignment created by willful behavior and the predefined, basic attributes of *nkrabea*? Does *nkrabea* evolve from one lifetime to the next or is it a distinct phenomenon in each life incarnation?

Noro. *Noro* literally means semen. The child inherits her/his *noro* from the father. The *noro* reflects aspects of personality passed on to the individual from the father through the semen. It is most influential on the child's *sunsun* or personality in the first 12 years of development. Through the father's *noro* he endows his children with some of his own *sunsun*. Among the Akan, there are seven *ebusua* (bloodline clan groups with affiliation defined through matrilineal lines) and 12 agnatic groups called *noro*. *Noro-egyabosom* are groups of people composed of the same spiritual essence. The specific group the individual belongs to is determined by the father's family lineage. Unlike the matrilineal affiliation generated through the blood of the mother (*moɔyɛ*) the *noro* provides a spiritual affiliation which distinguishes people by: (1) a spiritual essence; (2) the river they wash in; (3) the details of their religious observances, rites, prohibitions; (4) the animals they venerate; and (5) the greeting exchange among members within a group. Its significance is further evidenced in the son's reverence for his deceased father. The son, who carries this spiritual affiliation to his nuclear family, reveres his father by invocation of the father's *sunsun* and river deity. Each *noro-egyabosom*¹³ group has a group name and characteristic features. For example, the *bosmpɔra noro* group are tough. The *bosom*

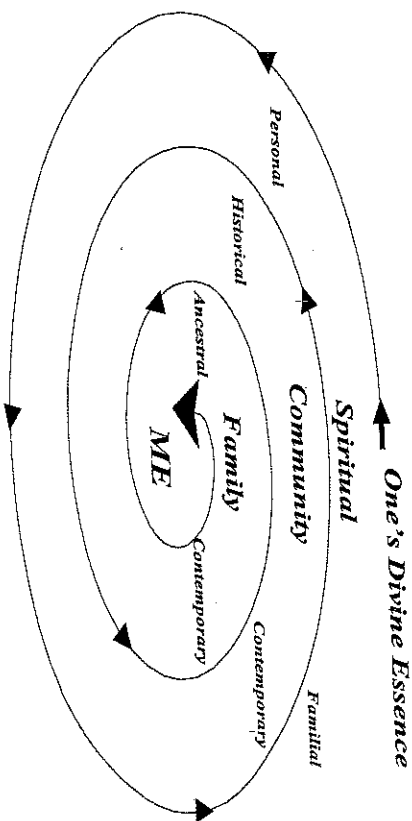
nkrabea are audacious. The *bosomsika* are fastidious. Each *noro-egyabosom* have their own special day and body of water or natural element (Abass, 1998; Ephritim-Donkor, 1997; Fisher, 1998). These *bosom* do not go to the ancestral world. After a person's death his *sunsun* returns to the father's river deity where it might reincarnate in the father's family line (Fisher, 1998). They remain in the paternal household to protect members of the home while awaiting reincarnation. What are the differential and demonstrable influences of the 12 *noro-egyabosom* on personality and functioning? How do these interact with and relate to the influence of *sunsun*, *okra* and *mogyɛ*? How do they facilitate completion of *nkrabea*? How do the *egyabosom* differ in function and influence from the *nananom nsamanɔ* (ancestors) and other *abosom* (deities)?

Mogyɛ. The *mogyɛ* is the maternal blood that links the individual to an ancestral lineage. Through *mogyɛ* the person is assigned a permanent place within the family and society. In the process of creation it is released by *amodinɔ*—among the Dornaa of Ghana the oldest deity whose abode is in the vagina and is symbolized by menstrual blood (Field, 1960). *Mogyɛ*, the maternal blood that courses through one's body, is the *okra*'s abode on earth. After death it joins *Aasee Yaa*, mother earth. As the vessel or dwelling place of the *okra* it gives strength to the *okra*. Initial fieldwork has suggested that the strength of the *mogyɛ* (and its relationship to *okra*) determine the potency of the person's mental faculty. What more can be said of the attributes and function of *mogyɛ*? What are the psychological implications/manifestations of the relationship between *mogyɛ* and *okra*? What is the relationship between *mogyɛ* and the *nananom nsamanɔ* (ancestors) who are intimately involved in the day-to-day well being of the person and family and how are they different in function and source from the *noro-egyabosom* in their influence on consciousness, personality, and behavior?

Nananom Nsamanɔ. The *nananom nsamanɔ* are the ancestors. They reside in *samanadze asamando*; the place of *samans* or spirits. The ancestors play a direct role in the day-to-day matters of the individual, family and community. They affect consciousness, especially during the dream states (*dae*) since dreams are one of their primary forms of communication between the physical and metaphysical world. How? How do they influence human behavior and emotions specifically at the level of *sunsun*, *mogyɛ* and *suban*? Within the process of reincarnation, how do the ancestors re-manifest in the current life of the individual? *Abosom*. The *abosom* are the spirits or deities. They are the children of *Oryenkopon* (God). Their protection and influence extends to the level of a town, shrine, family, or individual (Appiah-Kubi, 1981). What role

do the *abosom* play in the development and functioning of the person, particularly personal *abosom*? How do they influence the development and function of consciousness? What is the relationship between attributes of *abosom* and the people they guide and protect? As yet another manifestation of spirit, how are the *abosom* consciously and unconsciously experienced by the person? According to Nobles (1997) spirit can be experienced as an urge and desire for what is excellent, good, and right; that which makes for ethical character and conduct; the impetus for concern beyond self to other; the sense of inner power and dignity; the compelling need to understand the nature of the divine and thereby life itself; and the foundation of our meaning and purpose in life. How does this fit with the description of the actual experience and expression of spirit and spiritness in daily, lived experience through divination, trance possession and dream state mechanisms of communication with the deities?

An understanding of the Akan and similar African schemas of the elements of human beingness should contribute significantly to African psychology's articulation of the core aspects of the person and models of health promotion and intervention. It can also aid African people in the process of self-definition, mental and spiritual liberation, and empowerment. Informed by the Akan schema, if asked the question, who am I, the trajectory of questions to supply an answer consistent with an African conceptualization begins not with a discussion of genetics, environmental influence, personality cognitive style, learning, and personal inclinations. It begins with an identification of the divine source of one's being. It begins with a recognition of (1) the spiritual dimensions of the self, both personal and



Who Am I?

Figure 2. Questions in the service of self-definition.

familial; (2) the connection to the community in the historical and contemporary sense; and (3) family origins (ancestral and contemporary).

As illustrated in Figure 2, what emerges from the Akan schema is the realization that within the African conceptualization of self there can be no "I" without a "we". The multidimensionality of self brings an appreciation for the layers of understanding that must be brought to bear in any consideration of who a person is, what they do and why.¹⁴ This multidimensional self is socio-historical, psychological, ancestral, spiritual and existential (in the form of destiny/purpose). Table 3 presents some of the questions contained within each of these dimensions that contribute to a full comprehension or awareness of the constellation of factors

Table 3
Levels of Awareness of Self
"There can be no 'I' without a 'We'"

Level	Orienting Questions
<i>Socio-historical Awareness of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who Am I? Where in The World Am I? What in the World is Happening to Me? How In the World Did I Get There?
<i>Psychological Awareness of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who am I? How did I come to know that this is who I am? Is this what I want and need to be? Is this all that I will be? What makes me - me? What makes me a human being? Am I just like everybody else or am I like no one else or am I both? Who would I most like to be like and why? What are my values? What is important to me in life? By what principles in life do I live?
<i>Ancestral Awareness of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who are my people? Have I studied their lives and learned the lessons of their life experiences? Do I respect their memory, sacrifice, and struggle?
<i>Spiritual Awareness of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who am I spiritually? How do I relate to the spirit that is me, that is within me, that surrounds, uplifts, and grounds me in this world? Do I respect the spirit that is me, that is an extension of the divine? HOW?
<i>Destiny/Purpose Awareness of Self</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why am I here? What did I come here to accomplish? What obstacles/challenges must I overcome?

that contribute to the psychology of an individual. These dimensions of the self also point to sources of psychological distress and potential foci for psychological intervention and healing.

Finally, the socio-historical awareness of the communal self for African people must include an appreciation of the *maafa* experiences endured by the group. Kambon (1999) presents a series of thought provoking questions to orient African psychology's analysis of the *maafa*. Some of them are:

- "How did the *maafa* attack/impact African's physically, mentally and spiritually?"
- "What did the *maafa* mean culturally for Africans? Did it mean the deculturalization/destabilization of African culture . . . ? Did it attack Africans' sense of reality, their sacred space, their spiritual reality and their God?"
- "What did the *maafa* mean psychologically to Africans? Did it mean essentially the colonization of the African mind . . . ?"
- "What does the *maafa* mean overall for African/Black psychology?" (Kamfon, 1999).

Including the African holocaust is critical because:

1. It addresses and clarifies the psychological manner (the psycho-cultural corridor of time) through which the masses of Africans entered the American context.
2. It represents the essential process through which Africans in America became consciously disconnected from their core African cultural reality.
3. The psycho-historical trauma of this horrific experience created a spiritual void and left behind a profound distortion in the (collective-cultural) psychological existence/identity of Africans . . .
4. Africans must re-travel this painful path both psychologically and spiritually in order to heal the African psyche . . . (Kamfon, 1999).

In the scheme of history, the *maafa* of enslavement was only yesterday and the dehumanization and injustices of post-enslavement were just last night. Present day racism continues to assault people of African descent on a daily basis. Have we adequately accounted for its effect?

The Concept of Consciousness in African Psychology

Consciousness has reemerged as an acceptable subject of inquiry within Western science. It has benefited from the diverse perspectives and tools of multiple disciplines (among them medicine, physics, chemistry, biology, neuroscience, computer science, psychology, and philosophy). Nonetheless, under the guillotine of Ockham's razor, this ethereal construct has defied any coherent model that synthesizes the emerging perspectives and findings. Hoping to shed additional light on the subject, a more recent addition to consciousness studies has been the contribution of culturally specific conceptualizations. Given that all human mental

activity occurs within a configuring framework of culture (Drummond, 1996) and we "experience our culture's collective understanding of what it is to be conscious" (Scott, 1995), our examination of consciousness should deal with the systems and phenomena that are located within the "labyrinthine folds of a brain-culture-physical reality manifold" (Drummond, 1996). An African cultural conceptualization would extend the contextualization of consciousness to include the labyrinthine folds of a spirit-soul-physical-brain-culture reality manifold. Within this schema, consciousness at its most basic level functions as a process of perception and conception of the material/physical world. The ultimate essence and expression of consciousness, however, extends far beyond this fundamental process.

In the African deep structure of culture there are many realms of existence that can be accessed through preter-rational consciousness (Ayoade, 1979). 'Preter' is a prefix meaning 'beyond' or 'more than' or past. Preter-rational consciousness means consciousness beyond mere rational methods and is based upon processes that are indicative of a higher mind. Preter-rational consciousness, applied to African psychology, would employ principles of similarity, contact and transferability to name a few. Through these principles, the vital force in an object can be distilled through the expertise of the traditional healer-priest. Similarity, for example, is based upon the understanding that similarity between an act which is performed and the expected result inevitably brings forth the desired result. 'Like begets like and like poles attract.' Incantation (the power of the word) adds to the potency of this process. In this preter-rational schema, the mind can look simultaneously at the future, present and past and possibly influence all. This *quantum* consciousness is an everyday occurrence in Africa and it may suggest the 'how' in consciousness is an everyday occurrence and contemporary African science. How did the knowledge base found in ancient and contemporary African science. How did the ancient Kemites build the pyramids and calculate the great year? How did the Akan, the Yoruba, the Wolof, and the Ewe develop such a sophisticated compendium of plant medicines? How did the Dogon discover *Po tolo* (Sirius B) and its properties? How did Africans' sophisticated skills in metallurgy develop?

In part, consciousness research has centered on physiologically based processes of human awareness contributing to a central debate in the field between proponents of the 'hard' and 'soft' approach to mental phenomena. The 'hard problem' centers around the belief that human experiences are the result of neural activity. In this reductionist or materialist view (e.g., Crick, 1994; Dennett, 1996), human consciousness can be reproduced in computers (artificial intelligence) and all reality can be reduced to basic laws of physical science. In contrast, proponents of the 'soft problem', often called dualists, believe that consciousness is beyond human understanding (McGinn, 1991). Consciousness is an "emergent phenomenon" (Scott, 1995) in which culture serves a central organizing function through which people experience consciousness in its many forms. Chalmers (1996) further suggested that a concept of consciousness should be a non-reductive, naturalistic dualist theory that also involves an "extra ingredient." This extra

ingredient has been variously described as chaos, nonlinear dynamics, quantum mechanics, and (surprisingly enough) “the soul” by some Western academics.

An African worldview (Ani, 1980, 1994; Diop, 1989) would be more consistent with the argument that consciousness consists of something beyond simply the brain, its activities, and human sentience. It would be more akin to the emergent theory that rests on the assumption materialism and dualism can coexist in a theory of consciousness with culture providing an understanding of what it is to be conscious. The African view would extend the bounds of the emergent theory however giving precedence to the role of the spiritual realm since spiritual processes feature prominently in African culture, psychology and theories of consciousness.

We must develop a deeper understanding of African metaphysics, the meaning of spirit in relation to human beingness and the role of spirit in the illumination of *adwene daho* (consciousness). To do so requires a better understanding of African tools of knowing (epistemology) which do not constrict themselves to the boundaries set by Western empiricism that engage only tangible phenomena capable of controlled manipulation, rational explanation, and prediction. Returning to the Akan schema, there are three levels of reality: *nea wohu* (that which you can see); *nea wohu* (that which you do not see or sense with the normal senses); and *nea etra adwene* (the unperceivable—that which transcends thought such as a full comprehension of *Onyankopon*, the Supreme Being). These levels of reality (in Table 4) have corresponding levels of human consciousness that can be accessed by both the layperson and the highly skilled or trained practitioner.

In African metaphysics (Iroegbu, 1995) these levels of consciousness extend from sentience (awareness through the physical senses) to what I refer to as

Table 4
Philosophy of Being and Levels of Awareness

Medium	Consciousness	Description
Body	Sentience	Basic sensation reflexive (available to all animals)
Brain	Consciousness	Awareness of sensations
Mind	Self-consciousness	Awareness of the awareness of sensations and other thought (conscious of self and conscious of consciousness)
Spirit	Preter-rational Consciousness	Awareness beyond limitations of sentient conscious awareness
Soul	Conscious Preter-rational Consciousness	Awareness of awareness beyond limitations; cognizant of preter-rational consciousness in progress; conscious of trans-sensory reality and conscious of self in relation to this reality

conscious preter-rational consciousness (to engage trans-sentient reality with conscious awareness of self in an active relationship with that reality).

Within an African conceptualization, consciousness reflects the combined influence of the soul, spirits, ancestral influences and destiny as well as the factors typically ascribed to consciousness in Western schemas (biology, subneural biology, and neuroscience, quantum physics, cognition, function, and cultural/environmental factors). Here, spiritness is as important as the physical manifestation of self. Preter-rational spiritual processes are a necessary building block in the construction of any African model of consciousness. These spiritual aspects of self are central to the essence and expression of all forms and stages of consciousness and human functioning.

Within the context of African theories of consciousness, reality is that which exists independent of the sentient observer. Perception is the information garnered, in normal states of consciousness, through sentient means and interpretation of sensed data. Conception is the manipulation of this data into meaningful abstractions that approximate what we believe to be “reality.” Knowledge, and in part, functional consciousness or awareness, is simply the collection of perceptions and conceptions. In an African cultural model as illustrated in Figure 3, there are degrees of approximation to true “reality” which can be understood by an explanation of the essence, expression and functions of consciousness operating at the sentient, preter-rational and conscious preter-rational levels. Theories of quantum consciousness most closely approximate this initial impression of what might be an African concept of the essence and expression of consciousness (Grills & Livingston, 2001).

In the double-aspect theory there is a common substance or reality from which mind and matter or the mental and physical arise. This substance/reality is

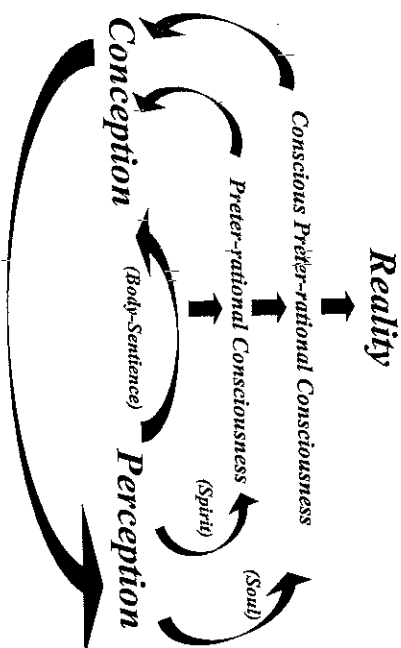


Figure 3. Successive approximations to reality.

"quantum reality." In the African sense, that quantum reality is spirit/energy, similar to string theories where everything in the universe is reducible to energy. The source and origin of this energy is *Onyakopon* (God). God and the notion of cosmological substantiation (everything is made of the same spiritual substance and is interconnected) are the most basic components of life in African thought.

Finch (1998) discussed African ways of knowing or epistemology in relationship to the "fifth dimension" in which the universe is perceived through spirit. Finch stated: "We are not dealing here just with symbolic material arising from deep within the Jungian collective unconsciousness." *The Pale Fox* (Griale & Dieterlen, 1986) shows us that highly complex empirical information has come into the possession of a people lying almost entirely outside modern technological culture. Since the Dogon do not possess the methodologies or apparatus of modern science, we are driven to conclude that there must be other "pathways" for acquiring such data; verifiably, other ways of knowing. This perspective exemplifies one of the main points in African concepts of consciousness. There are other ways of knowing (and realms of consciousness) that do not rely upon the basic senses, logic or reason. We can appreciate these other ways of knowing (and realms of consciousness) by studying African philosophy and spiritual systems that present a heuristic for understanding the world, human beingness, consciousness, and science. African traditional priests/healers use a multitude of strategies (divination, rhythm and sound, the drum, speech, ritual, manipulation of electromagnetic and vibratory energy) that increase their ability to tap into this fifth dimension of pre-rational methods of perceiving the universe.

African conceptualizations fully integrate these spiritual processes into their models of self. The person (self) and corresponding processes and levels of consciousness can be viewed as derivatives of both essence and expression. Existence (in the form of essence) precedes expression (the state of being alive and cognizant). Essence reflects the essential nature, operating principles, substance, heart, gist, crux or core of human beings as persons; it is that which makes one human (Grills & Rowe, 1998). Expression or manifestation is the "outer envelope" (Nobles, King & James, 1995), evidence, tangible presentation or articulation of that essence. Western conceptualizations have restricted the purview of human behavior, particularly the reductionist view of consciousness, to this outer envelope.

Conclusion

Western psychology orders its body of knowledge into discrete yet overlapping categories designed to explain human behavior, thought, and emotion (e.g., physiological psychology, cognitive psychology, motivation and emotion, learning, memory, psychopathology, social psychology, psychotherapy, community psychology, etc). African psychology integrates itself into the broader human context of spirituality, divine order, social structure, philosophy, history, science

and culture.

Western psychology fully incorporated many precepts and principles established by the scholars of Ancient Kemet and subsequently consciously removed several from their models. Among those removed were principles related to the soul and spirit and the centrality of such cultural constructs as interdependence, connection to nature, and social collectivity in human functioning. Regardless of Western psychology's decision to extract certain phenomenon in their efforts to define human psychological reality, these concepts continue to manifest themselves in the daily practice of diasporan African life and psychology (e.g., extended family; religious expression and practices; music, song and dance; shared participation; social-afflictive emphasis; and phenomenal time).¹⁵

Western psychological research often speaks of the "power" associated with an empirical test of some concept in psychology. The greater the power, the more convincing the argument or theory and the more likely the concept will define Western reality. One could ask: what is the explanatory power of the Western model of psychology in its application to African Americans? Nobles (1998) offered another dimension to this notion of power in psychology. Power is the: "ability to define reality and to have other people respond to your definition as if it were their own." The most important reality to define is the meaning of your own human beingness (Nobles, 1998). African psychology offers a method of reclaiming that power of self-definition for African people.

What then is the relevance of African psychology today? Among the many factors that make it a viable model from which African centered psychology can draw are: 1) the cultural retentions among Africans in the diaspora that warrant an African based approach to mental wellness; 2) its capacity to assist in the process of maintaining alignment and authenticity with the essence of who we are as African people; 3) its ability to aid in the liberation of the African psyche (soul/spirit) from the ever lingering soot of hundreds of years of enslavement, oppression, and colonialism; and 4) the facility to empower that psyche with a conscious awareness of what was, what is, what can be, what can be seen, what cannot be seen, and what is beyond comprehension.

The objective of Black psychology is the mental liberation of African Americans in the U.S. It does this oftentimes within the confines of the Western paradigm of human behavior. The objective of African psychology is the total mental, spiritual, and social liberation of African people throughout the diaspora. It relies on African tools of knowing (epistemology) that do not limit themselves to the rules of Western empiricism which engages only tangible phenomenon capable of being manipulated, rationally explained, and controlled. African psychology begins with the recognition that reality includes: *nea wonhu* (that which you can see); *nea wonhu* (that which you do not see or sense with normal sentient faculties); and *nea extra adwene* (that which is unperceivable; that which we can never see). These levels of reality have corresponding levels of human conscious-

ness that can be accessed by the lay and the highly skilled or trained practitioner. These levels of reality and corresponding levels of consciousness complement a comprehensive conceptualization of the self, of human beingness and a more inclusive, dynamic model of the therapeutic process from prevention to diagnosis to tertiary intervention. In other words, African psychology offers a holistic, life affirming, efficacious model of healing capable of complementing the African essence in Africans throughout the diaspora.

In the contemporary advancement of African psychology we must create a nosology and glossary of terms that synthesize and reflects African epistemology, constructs, models, assumptions and practices. As Ajamu (1997) noted: "... the most fundamental and deeply entrenched aspect of conceptual incarceration resides at the level of language." Such a nosology is emerging in the contemporary work of radical or constructionist Black psychologists. This nosology would move us closer to the practice of mental and spiritual liberation and development. It will move us closer to "*sachku sheti*"; the deep, profound and penetrating search, study, understanding and mastery of the process of illuminating the human spirit (Akbar, 1994). In the practice of *sachku sheti* we can penetrate and embrace more profoundly the multitude of concepts the ancestors have left us.

The African psychology paradigm requires a fundamental shift in the conceptualization of reality and epistemology. Although the African mind contends that the universe is composed of visible and invisible dimensions this does not imply that these aspects of existence are two distinctly separate categories like the Western concept of dualism would suggest. Rather, in the African conceptualization, they are two points on a continuum, constantly interacting with each other (Grills & Ajei, in press). The idea of reality unfolding on a continuum has enormous relevance for the African theory of human nature, psychological functions and the interpretation of thought, behavior and emotion. In the unknown depths between physics and psychology, philosophy and biology, and mathematics and linguistics, African principles and practices reveal the prospects of a new science destined to bridge the gap between the polarity of mind and matter, essence and expression (Ajei & Grills, 2000).

Notes

¹Ulamawazo is a Kiswahili term used by Ani (1994) to represent worldview.

²Maafa is a Kiswahili term used by Ani (1980) meaning great disaster.

³Ase is a Yoruba term referring to divine power and capacity.

⁴ For illustrative purposes, an Akan conceptualization is presented. Akan culture offers a fairly well articulated model of the components of the self along with a rich cultural tradition of proverbs, cultural symbols, code of ethics, social structure and spiritual system that sustains it. Traditional priests/healers (*okomfos*), linguists (*okyemses*), and elders (*nanas*) have been receptive to efforts by African American psychologists to practice sankofa and retrieve the knowledge contained in this rich cultural heritage. While the Akan system is used for illustrative purposes, considerable material is now becoming available for other systems (e.g., the Yoruba, Woloff, Zulu, Ju'hoansi, Herero, Ewe, Igbo, Mende, Bantu-Kongo, Dogon, Hausa, Kalahari and the ancient Kemites).

⁵ Note this is similar to the Dogon who locate the soul in the clavicles. (Livingston, 1998).

⁶ God is air. Air is God. Air is breath and the act of breathing equals the presence of God. The soul returns to God via the breath.

⁷ The Akan have suggested that when behavior is *suban bon* (reflecting bad character), the *okra* may flee (manifested as severe illness) or become sad (manifested as neuroses).

⁸ The Akan have suggested that the transmission of *sunsum* is usually associated with men because women are not spiritually strong enough to transmit *sunsum* to their children (Ayim-Aboagye, 1993). Later field research in the African Concepts of Consciousness Study revealed that semen, breast milk, and blood share similar functional and metaphysical properties. Given the similarity between them the term "strong enough" may be a poor translation for what is meant regarding the transmission of *sunsum* and requires further research. More will be said of this and other elements of the self in future publications.

⁹ *Wer* is a quality measured in terms of strength or weakness. Too much or too little is problematic. It fluctuates with the emotions of the heart and soul. For example, when grieving it is low. Balance is optimal (Ephurim-Donkor, 1997).

¹⁰ There are three stages one must go through to reach *awerekyekyer*. The first stage is *ayamhyehye*, a burning, churning, gnawing sensation in the stomach that you feel when you are confronted with a suffering human being. Women are proficient at moving from this level to the second stage. The second stage is *ahumobar* which is compassion; attending to the suffering person. If one remains at this stage and does not progress further they could become apathetic. The third and final stage to *awerekyekyer* is *abadai* which is beneficence; movement to relieving the suffering person's state of want. *Abadai* allows you to express the comfort and gentle counsel associated with *awerekyekyer* (Fisher, 1998).

¹¹The elders have strong *sunsum* by virtue of attaining old age. Their strong *sunsum* can help or harm others. (Members of the Ghana National Association of Traditional Healers).

¹²The child receives two names after the first eight days of life and is expected to emulate the person whose name they receive. The first name is automatically assigned and is based on the day of week of the child's birth. These names represent the seven qualitative souls of God. In other words, the child is born with a particular type of soul based on the quality of God in attendance on the day of her/his birth. These days have their own characteristic attributes (e.g., female day name Afiia for those born on Friday are adventurers and always on the move; male day name Yaw for those born on Thursday are aggressive, courageous and eager to confront). According to the Akan, your name is the final seal of a complete person and is taken seriously. It is linked to the general meaning of existence; to lead a good life and achieve the most precious prize of all, an ideal name (*dzen pa*) for posterity.

¹³Bosom in Twi means deity or spirit.

¹⁴A similar conclusion would be drawn from other African schemas such as the Yoruba concept of the person (*Eyriyan*) with its concepts of the divine breath (*emi*), soul (*emi plus ori*) shadow (*ojiji*), guardian spirit (*ori*), deities (*orisa*), personal destiny (*ayanmo ipin*), heart/spiritual source of emotion (*okan*) and ancestors (*egun*) or the Bantu's concepts of human kind (*mu-nlu*), or the Igbo with their concept of the soul (*chi*) ancestors (*eke*), shadow (*onyinyo*), or the Tonga in Zambia and their concept of *unyuwa* (that which forces people to behave in special ways in keeping with the spirit), or the Dogon concept of the person (*dime*).

¹⁵See Kambon, 1999; Hilliard, 1997; Holloway, 1991; Barrett, 1974; Smith, 1994; Noll, 1992; and Pinckney, 1998 for a more complete discussion of examples of cultural retentions.

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A Warm Reunion: Comments on African Psychology

Camara Jules P. Harrell

Some of us will greet Dr. Grills's paper as one does an old, but neglected friend. The joy in seeing the individual is genuine, as may be the relief if we find her or him robust and in good health. Nevertheless, one suffers more than a hint of regret and embarrassment that so much time has lapsed between contacts. The penalty for this sin of omission goes beyond the realization that many warm hours of fellowship are forever lost. Close personal friendships are rare and nurture the best aspects of our personalities. Neglecting them forever truncates the personal growth of both parties.

Drs. Clark, McGee, Nobles, and Weems (1975), in the seminal "Voodoo or IQ" paper did more than usher in a different approach to psychology in the diminutive first volume of the *Journal of Black Psychology*. They served notice that it was time to fashion a new kind of psychology. They introduced Black psychologists to a new and very special friend.

Ironically, the new approach was grounded in an ancient, thoroughly human worldview and epistemology. It invited us to view African people through an African lens. African Psychology shifted the center of the debate over the practices of the larger discipline. The question was no longer which approach within Western psychology best addressed the needs of people of African descent. Now we entertained the constructionist assumption that the utility of any of the approaches would be severely limited. The paradigm compelled us to go beyond being good and Black. We were to function according to what we are, African. Indeed, we would have to shed some old clothes to which we had become accustomed. Still, the payoff would be the creation of a fresh psychology that would be consonant with the cultural fabric of African people.

Many of us would watch developments in African psychology from a distance. We opted for activities far safer or more lucrative than creating a new psychology steeped in the worldview of a vanquished people and the philosophy emanating from a ravaged continent. History would show that the real work would be left to a mighty few. Kambo (1992), Akbar, (1994), Myers (1988) and Azibo (1996) would make major contributions. However, as early as 1986 Wade Nobles would sound the call in the subtitle of his text for a "reclamation, reascension, and revitalization" of African Psychology. Had more of us served as workers rather than distant watchers, the field would have progressed much more rapidly.