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# An Argument for the Integration of Black Psychology in Undergraduate Psychology Program

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**An Argument for the Integration of Black Psychology in Undergraduate Psychology  
Program**

by

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An Undergraduate Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

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in

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and

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Thesis Advisor

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### **Abstract**

When we think about the theories behind the foundation of American psychology, many European names come to mind (i.e. Freud, Erickson, Brofenbrenner etc.). This Euro-American mode of psychology has been the standard in American Undergraduate education since the founding of a formal psychological education in the U.S. but what about names like Wade Nobles, Joseph White, Na-im Akbar, or Linda James Myers? These forerunners of Black Psychology are elusive in the foundational education of current American Undergraduate programs due to longstanding racial bias in the field. This bias reflects the systemic racism that American culture was founded on. This paper presents the argument for Black Psychology to be a foundational educational requirement for all Undergraduate Psychology programs in the United States for the benefit of not only the field, but for society as a whole. Through a brief history of the discourse in the psychological field, origins of Black psychology and the framework of Linda James Myers' optimal psychology theory, I will establish a foundational need for integration in education. Through the evaluation of the study of White privilege and cultural competency, I will discuss the implicit and explicit benefits of Black psychology specifically for White students. Lastly, in addressing the development of community and connectedness, I will establish the need for the study of Black psychology education for the benefit of society.

*Keywords:* black psychology, undergraduate psychology education, white privilege, cultural competency, optimal psychology, loneliness epidemic, cultural psychology, APA

## **An Argument for the Integration of Black Psychology in Undergraduate Psychology Program**

### **A Note on Language**

The term "America" or "American" will be used to only speak of the United States of America in this article. Black Psychology (BPSi) is meant to encapsulate the field of Black Psychology and all collective theories under this umbrella unless otherwise noted. The term "privileged" can be assumed to refer to the "White" race, as this group is the highest racially privileged group in the United States. The greatest effort has been taken to ensure that the language within this article meets the APA's Inclusive Language Guidelines (2021a) any faults found have escaped the multiple editing processes of this author. Full responsibility is taken and apologies are sincere.

### **The APA's New Commitment**

In October of 2021, the American Psychological Association (APA) released a public statement acknowledging their role in "Promoting, Perpetuating, and Failing to Challenge Racism, Racial Discriminating, and Human Hierarchy in U.S.". This thorough and candid statement, with over 33 items of acknowledgment and change, addresses APA's history and an action plan to begin systemic reparations within the organization and within guidelines for the psychological field as a whole. Some of these acknowledgements include psychologists contribution to the ideas of human hierarchy and study of racial difference, and therefore their contribution to the financial gap and class disparities, as well as the acknowledgment of the minimizing and dismissal of the Black community during the civil rights movement which subsequently lead to the formation of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPSi). Among the aforementioned acknowledgments, such changes were put into effect that the APA will no

longer support research based on the assumption of human value "based on a White-default" (APA, 2021b) and will support and promote equity-focused approaches, as well as psychologists are encouraged to question and "consider the limitations of White Western-oriented clinical practice" (APA, 2021b). This statement was released by the APA as a direct outcome of the justice reform movement of 2020 and the broad impact it had on society and institutions.

This statement would go on to inform the release of the updated "Principles for Quality Undergraduate Education in Psychology" from the APA in February 2023. This updated report focused on two quality principles, and 15 recommendations. The first quality principle in this report recommends faculty members to endeavor to provide ethical and culturally responsive education, professional development, and support students with diverse and intersecting identities. Under this principle, faculty are encouraged to be mindful about incorporating diversity, science, and a global perspective into their courses.

The impact of this statement from the informing and governing entity within the psychological community itself will be assessed in the future as changes are implemented, but what of the past that brought us to this point?

### **A Brief Psychological History of Context and Race**

Since the founding of psychology, the question has always existed in one form or another of whether or not a person's history, their context, has a place within psychology. Sigmund Freud, one of the most influential and foremost mentioned founding members of the psychological field, functioned under the assumption that the minds of humanity were universal, that all humans had the same psychological functions (Jones, 1961). Freud believed it was the duty of psychoanalysis to uncover these universalities, and through this exploration "It called for no great effort...for psychoanalysis to ignore the differences that arise among [people] owing to

the multiplicity of races, languages, and countries" (as cited in Gilman, 1992). Although Freud's view of universality was optimistic in its hypothesis of the nature of the human mind, and set the origins for further theories to be built on, it has had devastating effects within White psychology and on society. This ignorance created space for the active pursuit of racial research such as eugenics which perpetuated the idea that racial differences were biologically based and thus supported hierarchies, segregation, and sterilization practices (APA 2021b).

Even as Freud held this idea of universality, another group of psychologists emerged who believed differently. Alfred Adler, for instance, believed that as humans are social beings, all behaviors are therefore socially influenced, embedded, and have meaning on a societal level (Carlson & Engler-Carlson, 2017). It is worth noting that Adler would replace Freud as the president of the Vienna Society- a league of psychoanalysts that had, through revolt, forced Freud to 'retire' (Jones, 1961). Moritz Lazarus, an ethnopsychologist believed, " Human beings are the creation of history... there is neither feeling nor emotion which is not in a complicated manner dependent on historical determinants" (as cited in Gilman, 1992). Both of these psychologists existed, published, and interacted with Freud's school of psychological thought, but their prominence in psychological history education is muted, and at best sectioned into their subfields. The presence of these psychologists in the history of White psychology speaks to an active suppression of ideas that recommended us to view humanity not from a lens of ignoring our differences, but, at the very least, of acknowledgment

During the time of this growing discourse in White psychology in Europe, W.E.B. Du Bois, a prominent sociologist and civil rights activist, was publishing the article "The Souls of White Folk". In this article, he called for criticism of White privilege, the idea of universality, and White racelessness (Rabaka, 2017). His perseverance in these criticisms lended fuel to the

necessary task of calling out the blindspots in psychology in a White racist society. This task would be taken up by Black psychologists who thrived in spite of racial obstacles and reached a breaking point during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1968<sup>1</sup>.

### **A Brief History of Black Psychology**

In 1968, in the wake of several racial psychological presentations focused primarily on the idea of Black peoples intellectual inferiority- 14 years after the infamous *Brown v. Board of Education* case that led to the end of legal segregation- and in the aftermath of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., 75 Black psychologists<sup>2</sup> left the APA (Cummings & Cummings, 2021). This separation was the beginning of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi). Due to the APA's condoning and continued promotion of racist ideologies in light of the Civil Rights Movement, one of the initial concerns of the ABPsi was the APA's failure to leverage its resources towards the purpose of eradicating racism in the White dominant society (Williams, 2008). The ABPsi states a common mission for the promotion and advancement of African Psychology<sup>3</sup>, influencing and affecting social change, and developing programs where Black psychologists assist in solving problems within Black communities and other ethnic groups (Association of Black Psychologists [ABPsi], 2023). Although the ABPsi holds this common purpose, different ways of arriving at these goals emerged.

Joseph White wrote the pivotal article "Toward a Black Psychology" addressing the issue of the White dominant culture looking at the lived experience of Black Americans and labeling them as 'lacking' (White, 1970). Subsequent White psychological theories built on this 'lacking' foundation, because the Black experience was not replicating or mirroring the White experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Although an approximate 40-50 year time gap stands in this article, Holliday, B. G. (2009) gives a thorough accounting of the Black experience within the psychological space through this time.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that this number is published by the APA, but there may have been more present, a press release from September 1968 states "More than 200 Black Psychologists" were present (Williams, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> There is discourse within the community on the designation of 'Black Psychology' versus 'African Psychology'

This display of ethnocentrism- the perceptions of other cultures through the lens of standards and customs of one's own culture- led to the theory that the Black experience in America was in 'reaction' to the White dominant culture, rather than a culture that could exist within itself (Cokley & Garba, 2018). From this limited viewpoint, different schools of thought in Black psychology developed.

Three branches of Black psychology emerged that vary in their synthesis with White psychological theory from Traditional to Reform to Radical. Traditional Black psychology does criticize White psychology for its racial biases, but it does this from within the framework of Eurocentric psychology without acknowledgement of Black psychology as a separate school of thought. Reformed Black Psychology, however, also engages in this dissection of Eurocentric psychology for its racial biases, and the barrier this sustains to underrepresented populations, but acknowledges Black psychology as its own unique theory. In contrast, Radical Black psychology is focused on an African-centered framework that culminates around African culture and philosophy. Radical Black Psychologists don't have a focus on integrating or appealing to the Euro-American psychology, but are intent on transforming the internal narrative of the Black population (Cokley & Garba, 2018).

As well as their development of these different schools of synthesis, different methodologies have arisen in the pursuit of exposing the limitations of Euro-American psychology. These methods are respectively deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction. Deconstructional methods seek to identify the errors of Euro-American psychology, and is most often associated with Traditional school of thought. Reconstructional methods seek to correct the errors of Euro-American psychology and is most often associated with the Reformist school of thought. Constructional methods focus on the dissemination of completely new psychological



paradigms and is most closely associated with the Radical school of thought (Cokley & Garba, 2018).

In the development of Radical Black psychology, psychologists such as Wade Nobles and Linda James Myers were the founding psychologists of African Worldview. This approach classified the distinct cultural differences between Western cultures foundational values and African cultures foundational values. These theories set the origins for the approaches Black and Western culture has taken to developing senses of self, community, and engagement with their environment. These theories showcase how even the self-deemed 'Radical' branch of Black psychology provides value to the betterment of society as a whole.

#### *African Worldview and Optimal Psychology*

In Wade Nobles article "African Philosophy: Foundations for Black Psychology", the groundwork is laid that the Black experience is more than its existence in a racist society. Rather than focusing on the Black experience through the Western lens that focuses on the 'lack' aforementioned, Nobles' work concentrated on the positive elements derived from African ideology (Awosogba et. al., 2023). In his article "Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Self Concept", Nobles explains how pre-determined ideas influence the questions that psychologists ask. For example, if a racist White psychologist asks the question 'What aspects of Black behavior effects their inability to learn?', they are setting up the answer to exist within the idea that a Black person has an inherent inability to learn. This principle can be applied to how our worldview effects the lens through which we perceive others.

Nobles compares European worldview from African worldview (see [Table 1](#)) beginning with foundational ethos. In European worldview, there is greater focus on "survival of the fittest" and man having "control over nature" and African worldview focuses on "survival of the tribe"

and man being "one with nature". With these foundations, we see the values reflect in European worldview as competition, focus on individuality, and independence through separateness, whereas the values reflect in African worldview as cooperation, focus on collective responsibility, and independence through cooperativeness (Nobles, 1976).

This contrasting of worldviews is critical to understanding where White psychology is fundamentally unable to accurately assess Black psychology. It's looking at a landscape through two completely different scopes. Nobles argues that to accurately conceptualize the Black experience in the United States, one must be able to comprehend this experience through an African worldview. This article scaffolded the framework of what would become Africentric psychology or African-centered psychology.

In 1993, Linda James Myers wrote her book "Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology" that expanded on Noble's concept and brought it into the space of application. In this article, Myers lays the foundations of two conceptual systems- optimal (OCS) and suboptimal (SCS). These two conceptual systems set the foundation to discuss a Black model of psychological functioning.

The suboptimal conceptual system (SCS) reflect's some of the values explicitly stated in Nobles' European worldview and further explores the ideas of materialism, competition, and individualism. In this theory, the nature of reality, if principally material (ie- resources have a finite and limited amount), becomes, to survive, we must compete for these limited resources. The greater our material wealth is perceived the higher our status, but it does not contribute to a more fulfilled sense of self. With this focus on materialism and lack of connectedness, people existing in SCS experience feelings anxiety, depression, and the incessant search outside ourselves for something to make us feel whole. "Due to the resultant insecurity, some have an

incessant need to control, dominate, or *be better than others*" (Myers, 1993). This conceptual system can be found evident in the cultural desire to 'Keep up with the Joneses' and the consistent barrage of marketing in our faces encouraging consumerism to attain unattainable things (ie- beauty products to attain youth). This also shows how although Euro-American psychology can't speak to the racial experience, Afrocentric ideologies can speak to the dominant cultural experience. The byproducts of SCT are self-evident in the explicit recourse of White privilege- the competitive nature, and scarcity mindset that perpetuate an isolated sense of self (Myers, 1993).

Optimal conceptual system (OCS) values explicitly reflect and expand on Nobles' African worldview. OCS is labeled thus because it's greatest intention is to support the most positive experience in a holistic way (Myers 1993). Remember, this theory reflects Radical Black psychological theory and is focused on the most positive experience for Black people and other communities of color. This goal of maximum positivity is reached via the values of spirituality, interconnectedness, self-knowledge, and perceptual power. Spirituality is seen as the divine creation of our reality, and it is a person's perceptual power to see the divine reality. Spirituality also speaks to the intangible aspects of experience, those which can not be empirically measured. The aspects are not foreign to White psychology and are reflected in Freud's theory of 'ethos' (Awosogba et. al., 2023). Interconnectedness can be described within Myers' expansion on the extended self, "all of the ancestors, the yet unborn, all of nature, and the entire community" (Myers, 1993) are seen as interconnected, and thus an extension of one's self. As all past and present community coexist with nature within us, then our self-knowledge is the accumulation of all the knowledge that has come before, and is thus a lens by which Black people can assert their

perceptual power to elevate their consciousness which then strengthens connection to spirituality.

These conceptual systems speaks to not only the Black experience in the US, but can provide a lens by which White culture can begin to view itself from a new perspective. OCS can also bring reason as to how the lineage of the APA could have gone over 100 years without acknowledging its perpetuation of racist ideologies, *and* bring perspective as to how it can now begin to address the issue, and choose a new basis of reasoning. "...once our minds are free at a deep level- at the level of our conceptual system...we will, indeed, be liberated" (Myers, 1993).

### **Integration of BPsi and its Impact on Students and Society**

Based on the history of discourse within White psychology, the origins and emersion of Black psychology, and subsequently the African worldview, in consideration of the APA's mission to dismantle racism through promotion of equity-focused approaches, the questioning and consideration of limitations in White psychology, and promoting the incorporation of diversity, science, and global perspectives, I propose for the integration of Black psychology, specifically African worldview, in undergraduate psychology education.

I believe that the integration of Black psychology in undergraduate psychological education will improve on the philosophies of White psychology with the goal of developing psychological students not only into competent social scientists, but into better citizens for the greatest good of all communities. I believe this improvement can be obtained by 1) Introducing a White racial-self through the study of White privilege and 2) Introducing cultural competency practice from the lens of the racial-self and promoting action based on this education. In the pursuit of the APA's mission to dismantle systemic racism, we must acknowledge the implicit as well as the explicit biases and racist ideologies that exist individually. If we wish to foster a new

generation of radically open psychology students and thus citizens, then we must candidly address the values of White narrative, its influence on how we view ourselves, how we view others, and how this impedes the development of students.

### **White Privilege**

In our exploration of how to promote the APA's mission of dismantling institutionalized racism within the field of psychology, we can not begin to make progress without acknowledging internalized and subconscious White privilege in the US. If we are to truly break down internal racial processes in our privileged population, we must have them "...explore their own social construction of cultural identity..." (Guy-Walls, 2007).

The article "Narcissistic States of White Privilege and the Constructive Potential of Shame", written by White psychologist Stephen Anen, will be predominantly referenced throughout this section. Previous works of L. Layton, J. Caflisch, D.E. Holmes, D.W. Winnicott, and L. Jacobs are aggregated into this article and has been positively received within the BPsi community. This acknowledgment is to provide proof of the value of allyship in the promotion of Black psychological theory and to acknowledge racial positionality in the piece which I believe provides further contextual benefit.

Anen conceptualizes a psychoanalytic framework of White privilege that requires some initial definitions. White privilege, as it will be extrapolated on, involves subjective and objective awareness. *Subjective awareness* is described as being "totally into ourselves and our feelings while the rest of the world is in the background" (Bach, 1998 as cited in Anen, 2022). *Objective awareness* is described as the state of observational perspective-taking, as if viewing self and experience as an object. Anen (2022) synonymously ties White privilege to the concept of *privileged subjectivity*, which is defined as a conceptual "state occurring when societal privilege

has been internalized and normed within consciousness". In order for the mental state to reach this level, it is noted that privilege needs to be sufficiently present and active, meaning that not all people that are encompassed in the 'White' category will reach this state of being (Anen, 2022).

When White privileged subjectivity (WPS) is present, four major conditions define the perceptions experienced and its effects on the person's interaction with society<sup>4</sup>. 1) an entitlement of being recognized with attunement, 2) loss and limitation in the range of self-experience, 3) undifferentiated Whiteness, and 4) an increased capacity to be alone (Anen, 2022).

The concept of 'entitlement of being recognized with attunement' can be concisely described as the expectation that the self-chosen 'Self' that a person presents to society will be affirmed and supported. The narcissistic expectation is that, at the very least, this identity will not be impinged upon by the surrounding culture. In WPS, the society allows the individual to exist in the background as "social dynamics simultaneously orbit and norm...around...[them]" (Anen, 2022). This idea of social dynamics orbiting around oneself, priming a concentric sense of self, can be seen reflected in ethnocentric psychological theories mentioned by Wade Nobles.

The concept of loss and limitation in the range of self-experience and identity awareness is a slightly more complex condition. So considering the concepts of subjective and objective awareness, for WPS to exist, there must be a sustained split between the subjective self, and an objective awareness of society's role in maintaining the environment with which one exists. To simplify further, there must be a lack of understanding that in order for a privileged person to live in the version of their Selves that they *chose*, the society that they exist within must cater to them and by proxy, in catering to the privileged, must impinge upon the Selves of others, the

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<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that several other conditions have been identified and sources can be found within Anen, 2022 References.

oppressed. In the society that privileged Selves are self-chosen, there is a natural acceptance of self-as-subjective, whereas for other groups, since their sense of Self is impeded upon by society, their Self is perceived as objective (other-as-objective) (Anen, 2022). One can consider the state of 'other-as-objective' as the ability to objectively perceive the Self free from emotional reactivity.

In sustaining these representations, the privileged self-as-subject, and the oppressed other-as-object, WPS limits an individual's capacity to perceive conversely self-as-object and other-as-subject. To do so would collapse 'othering' by the privileged. Othering is defined in this context by the experience of one dissociating from negative aspects of themselves and projecting that onto another<sup>5</sup> (Winograd, 2020). In exchange for this paradoxical reality, the privileged limit their view of Self, in exchange for a false sense of wholeness. This exchange reflects on Myers' optimal conceptual theory whereby the SCS focused on materialistic nature which was the harbinger for societal status that also did not result in a satisfied sense of self.

The concept of undifferentiated Whiteness can be quickly conceptualized through application of the social psychologist theory of social categorization. When multiple races are encapsulated under the umbrella of 'White', for example: Irish, German, English, French, and Swedish etc.-Americans, this forms a social ingroup. This categorization that helps us to quickly make assumptions about groups of people, also fosters prejudice and stereotyping for those outside the social umbrella when gone unchecked. For those under the umbrella, however, a loss of racial identity takes place. Dorothy Holmes describes this as the 'White Out' effect, "a condition of diffusion wherein aspects of identity are not perceived" (Holmes, 2019 as cited in Anen, 2022). In the wake of this collapse of differences, there is also an inhibiting of Whiteness to not register in consciousness. In exchange for existing under this umbrella, White privileged

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<sup>5</sup> Attributed to 'othering' as defined by Dorothy E. Holmes

give up their racial-self, and thus their racial community. The societal privileges that come from being apart of this ingroup serve to not only blind its members to what they have lost, but also to explicitly minimize its value.

As it is described in Anen's article, the increased 'capacity to be alone' centers around D.W. Winnicott's paradoxical concept of being alone while someone else is present (Winnicott, 1958 as cited in Anen, 2022). This concept is described as a developmental sign of emotional maturity. In order for this level of development to be attained, there has to be a trust of society, that narcissistic assumption that one can choose to be alone among other people, and that Self will not be impeded upon. Although there is a sense of independence in the experience, there is an unconscious "dependency upon the facilitating status quo" (Anen, 2022). This capacity fosters states of autonomy and increased individuation, which due to the environment required for their growth, become privileged states, which only the ingroup can directly benefit from (Anen, 2022). A downside to this capacity of being alone with others is that privileged populations function under the unrealistic notion that they can exist independently from their community. Culturally, the systemic efforts towards shifting this status quo would inherently shift the implicit trust of the society, which can be a catalyst to greater change. If this logic is truly correlated, then steps currently taken by the APA can be seen as contributing to this shift.

In becoming aware of White privilege, privileged students can begin to acknowledge the 'benefits' of being apart of the ingroup, and find it lacking. In learning about African worldview, they can begin to comprehend the value of a racial-self, which can only be observed in a self-as-other mindset. A goal of this education would then be to foster a 'White racial-self', not to be confused with White supremacy, conversely it is the greater awareness of one's race and the oppressive history that has been inherited. In applying the "extended-self" ideology, which



includes those who have come before aka our ancestors, the privileged become accountable for their past.

If White privileged students are interacting with these concepts and exploring these pillars, shame is an inevitable product of this education. In the encouragement of students to engage in this self analysis, the dismantling of internal structures can begin, but are not without their risks. WPS does not foster a sense of self-as-other. The ability to allow space for change without the need to react to emotional upheaval, or in reacting, be able to hold the change made. Through the experience of processing shame, the White privileged must also conceive a sense of self-as-other (Anen, 2022). As one framework is dismantled, another must be scaffolded. With all due respect to Winnicott, this, to me, is a greater developmental sign of emotional maturity.

Since the higher education setting is meant to foster education and transformation, what better environment to facilitate the navigation of this experience that, if not actively monitored, can result in a tighter hold on WPS. Which, in turn, can be a greater safety concern for communities of color. If this process is not consciously done, feelings of shame can result in 'othering' onto those who initiated their awareness, in this example, that could be teachers, or fellow students that engage with the discourse. Their shame can be labeled as 'undeserved', and even transmute from the experience of 'feeling shame' to 'being shamed', and thus the 'othered' person becomes responsible for their shame. Confronting and developing tolerance for ones own shame is a necessary step in undoing White privilege, but shame that only leads to 'inaction and avoidance' is withholding of 'repair and betterment' of society and its citizens (Anen, 2022).

The goal of encouraging an objective sense of self is to cultivate a tolerance for shame, and to potentially perceive that shame constructively. When the experience of perceiving shame can be objectively done, "shame can then function as a signal to guide behavior" (Anen, 2022).

Ultimately, in promoting an education that facilitates this work, students can find guidance to hopefully begin confronting shame, and developing tolerance through the objective sense of self; the student can experience perceptions of having flaws and weaknesses without the need to react. In fact, the goal is that they can perceive experiences of "... having something novel brought into [their] awareness [as] a 'courageous gift', a term used by Saketopoulou (2020)" (Anen, 2022). In accepting this courageous gift and the awareness that comes with it, I believe we embrace a fundamental psychological principle and thus become catalysts for the betterment of society.

### **Cultural Competency**

In consideration of how to promote the APA's mission of dismantling institutionalized racism within the field of psychology, we can evaluate what trainings are currently in place, their efficacy in promoting change, and how their application can be expanded. Cultural competence, is passively defined in the APA's Dictionary of Psychology as "possession of the skills and knowledge that are appropriate for and specific to a given culture" (APA, 2023a). Cultural competence skill building is most commonly applied to the field of counseling as it focuses on more intimate therapeutic interactions with people of differing cultures. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) defined within their aspirational competencies the urging for privileged counselors, to actively increase their self awareness of "their social identity" and of their "clients' worldview" (Gonzalez-Voller, 2020). Considering the impacts White privilege education can have on the self awareness of social identity, via the development of a racial identity, and considering the applicability of African worldview in that development, the integration of Black psychology in undergraduate education would promote these active aspirational competencies.

In evaluating cultural competencies efficacy and ways it can be improved by the application of BPsi, dissonance was discovered between psychologists self-reported perceptions of competence, and the reality of counseling experiences by people of color. Most research done on cultural competency's effectiveness in psychology focuses primarily on the population of graduate counseling students (Gonzalez-Voller et. al., 2020, Presseau et. al., 2018, Beer et. al., 2011)<sup>6</sup>. In Gonzalez-Voller's longitudinal study, it was discovered that student's perceptions of multicultural competence increased the longer they were in their program, with the greatest increase in perception happening from orientation to the beginning of their practicum. These results show a precedence for the benefit of psychological students in their self-perceptions. It is unclear, however if these students, who were predominantly White (65.4%), held self-as-subject views or self-as-other. Which would be important to consider when comparing self-perceptions to client receptions.

Although this research has done a great deal to show the importance of this education, it is unable, due to its scope, to measure the benefit to the communities this training is focused on. A narrative study by Afsana Faheem (2023) focuses on the experiences of black and other ethnic minorities who had received counseling services in the past<sup>7</sup>. The narrative reports from clients spoke to a historically familiar experience. Some participants spoke of dissonance between their cultural, familial, and religious obligations and Western therapeutic expectations. Others spoke of having different psychological personalities depending on their environment and the cultural barriers present. Everyday cultural barriers were misinterpreted as 'extreme' incidents by White therapists (Faheem, 2023). This study shows the importance of evaluating impact on the

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<sup>6</sup> It will be noted research has been done with undergraduate social work students (Guy-Walls, 2007). As this focuses on the program of social work, it has been exempt from this article.

<sup>7</sup> Although this study was done in Bath, UK, due to the similarity in oppressive history between the US and UK, it is applicable for the nature of this article.

population that the training is meant for to best assess its effectiveness. It also highlights the concepts that are missing in White psychology. These concepts, however, are addressed in the values and theories of Black Psychology.

This lack of cultural competency application in Faheem's study, brings back the phenomena of White psychology assigning 'lack' aforementioned by Joseph White. Thus, further eliciting the inability to observe the culture and environment of a person when assessing them. While moving forward in the field of psychology towards greater racial awareness, we must take into account context. White privileged psychologists must remember that what dominant society has labeled as "deviant or anti-social behavior" may in fact be the healthy mental processes of a person of color who has developed the skills to maneuver their self-as-other in a world intent on 'othering' them (White, 1970). In considering the needs of communities of color, it is the responsibility of the privileged psychology student to acknowledge the racial history of psychology and acknowledge that the apprehension from communities of color are justified (Faheem, 2023). It is the responsibility and work of privileged psychologists to amend this history through their engagement with the dismantling of structural racism.

Although there is still work needed to be done for the better application of this training, when evaluating cultural competencies efficacy to promote social change, an association between cultural competency training and social justice advocacy was uncovered (Beer et. al., 2012 as cited in Gonzalez-Voller, 2020). This association was also attributed to students social identities, influenced by either their own experience with marginalization, or their extended contact with others who had experienced marginalization and oppression (Beer et. al., 2012). This variable of social identity supports my argument for the need to engage the most privileged groups (White, male) within our society. Cultural competency training must seek to not only

educate students on "the deleterious effects of social injustice, oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and privilege" (Crether et. al., 2008 as cited in Gonzalez-Voller, 2020) but to encourage and promote engagement and action to dismantle these structures in support of the APA's mission.

In the pursuit of dismantling racism, the privileged student's training in WPS will serve to bring awareness to the unconscious process of 'othering'. The development of the White 'racial self' will help in the understanding of cultural dissonance, and the development of 'radical openness', a term coined by Anton Hart. This term encompasses the ability of White privileged students to become so "radically undefended" that they can be open "to the person whose different from [them] in a profound way, in a deeply personal way, rather than 'learning to speak the language'" (Winograd, 2018). With these foundations, and the understanding of the values of African worldview which prioritize community and collective responsibility, the new generation of psychological students can better engage with communities of color, not only within professional settings, but also in a citizen capacity.

### **Loneliness Epidemic**

The goal of integrating Black psychology into undergraduate psychology programs ultimately serves as an incubator to produce more culturally competent and racially aware citizens. In disseminating the values of African worldview, American society can begin to make cultural shifts to the benefit of all. Evidence of this need for a cultural shift in America can be found in the United States Surgeon General's report *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. Within its 83 pages, this artifact addresses the evidence revealing trends towards deeper loneliness that were present and prevalent before the 2020 Pandemic. The trends were

then exacerbated by the "stay home" orders. It is noted by this author, that the results of this report, have an uncanny parallel to some of the byproducts of the sub-optimal conceptual system as described by Linda James Myers.

Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, describes some of the observed phenomena that was seen during the data gathering for this report that is indicative of a worldview that values competition and independence through separateness. "When there are scarce resources, this can also lead to competition among various groups, leading to an 'us' versus 'them' mentality" (Murthy, 2023). When discussing the actionable pillars to alleviate this epidemic, Murthy speaks to the need to cultivate social capital, one path to this cultivation is described through social cohesion. Social cohesion is defined in the report as "the sense of solidarity, within groups, marked by strong social connections and high levels of social participation, that generates trust, norms of reciprocity, and a sense of belonging" (Murthy, 2023). This definition can be seen reflected in the values of cooperation and groupness in African worldview.

Although this report concisely identifies this growing social issue and presents realistic actionable steps for change from individual to institutional levels, there is an underestimation of the perseverance of culture. The mental perceptions of the people will always hold influence over what is valued culturally. These mental perceptions are usually either unconsciously learned values handed down from elders, or echoes of large scale historical movements. This idea can be succinctly stated as "Just as behavior confirms the consciousness of an individual, history confirms the consciousness of a people" (Myers, 1993).

The integration of Black psychology education converges the societal needs for shifts in cultural consciousness and the APA's mission to dismantle racism within the psychological field.

### Discussion

Reflecting on the history of Black psychology, back to its origins and divergence within the field, there has always been a ground for consideration, contradiction and opposing views. As a student, part of our job is to question, expand, shatter, and rearrange what has come before. This process, so inherent in the essence of Black Psychology, would support the greater inherently rebellious nature of the infant scholar. It would open wide the consideration of other impactful frameworks, such as White privilege, to alleviate us from the myopic lens of self, expanding outward to greater compassion for fellow humans, and expand further to a greater sense of participation in communities and society.

Although in a perfect world, I would like to believe that all students approach education from the Alan Watts perspective of 'one goes to school because there is something that you wish to learn or somebody that you wish to learn from' (Watts, n.d.), I recognize that education today is tied to the ability to access so many opportunities, and thus not all students will come into the field of psychology for the conscious purpose of dismantling their racially-held beliefs. I hope in the process of integrating this education for students, they may stumble into an educational experience wholly outside of their expectations. That through no longer condoning the aversion from shame, we begin to cultivate the environment that supports this process of unweaving the threads of self-perception. That we can foster the genesis of self liberation from the limitations of White privilege. These kinds of processes are so deeply personal in their journey and content, that it seems irresponsible to not foster this exploration in an educational environment. Student's reactions to this dismantling should be discovered in more supportive environment, and not at the expense of people of color who are seeking help.

In addressing these educational aspirations, we must also address why I have argued for its presence at the undergraduate level. Students, whether going to become clinical psychologists or simply taking on a psychology major, all share a theme of wanting to improve society. If psychological programs can give the people who are actively engaging in this effort the tools they need to be good citizens and to improve society in the way we are advocating for, then we should be doing this. I extend this training to the undergraduate level psychologist because the assortment of careers that can be pursued with an undergraduate degree in psychology usually involves greater interaction with underserved communities. These career options have even greater pressing need for its employees to be culturally competent.

It's also pertinent to take into account that not everybody has the privilege of pursuing a graduate degree for a myriad of external factors. Restricting the scope of the application of this training limits its ability to enact positive change on a greater societal level. It maintains the hierarchical mindset that only the privileged or 'higher' educated have access to this level of empathy and growth.

It is important to acknowledge that the spiritual values in the optimal conceptual system model play a larger role than discussed within this article. It is worth noting in Beer et. al.'s article (2012) that there is a growing understanding that certain spiritual values, such as "inner drive, resiliency, and optimism" can be of benefit to psychological programs intent on fostering social justice advocacy. These values happen to be so entrenched in OCS that positive psychology owes a formative amount of its ideology to this framework. The application of these values in psychological education is a possible exploration for further research.



### **Limitations**

The author of this article is speaking from White experience, meaning that the deeper understandings and nuanced comprehensions of African worldview and optimal conceptual systems is elementary at best. Within the research done on cultural competency experiences of clients, no research could be found in the United States to aggregate the argument made within the Faheem, 2023 article. Future research to replicate this study are encouraged. Although much of the aforementioned argument can be made for all cultural areas of psychological study, this paper reflects on Black Psychology specifically to also underline the racial history in the United States directly focused at the Black population.

### **Positionality**

As a White privileged psychology student who is at the end of her program, the independent study of Black psychology and African worldview have elicited a personal journey through the educational framework I have just presented. I acknowledge my bias to the value of this journey, as well as acknowledge the reality that this journey will not be experienced the same way by any two people. It is not my intention to draw attention away from more expert voices in this discourse, but rather to be an advocate and ally for their work. I hope in answering the call for allyship (Myers, 1993, Rabaka, 2007) and expressing my support for the integration of Black psychology into undergraduate psychological education, I may lend a voice from the very population who needs this reframing most, in order to best support and raise up the voices and experiences of communities of color.

Just as the title and honor of 'community member' or 'ancestor' can not simply be assumed in an optimal conceptual system since "both positions require the proper consciousness"

(Myers, 1993), the title and honor of "ally" or "advocate" requires similar proper consciousness and this author aspires for this article to reflect the continued pursuit of this level of consciousness for the greatest good.

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Appendix

COMPARATIVE WORLD-VIEW SCHEMATIC

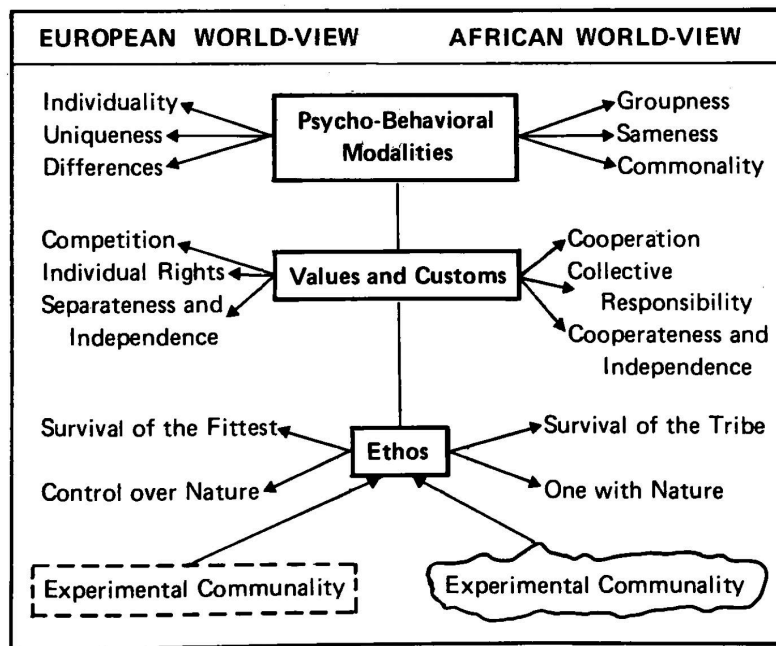


Table 1: *Comparative World-View Schematic* from Wade Nobles "Extended Self: Rethinking the So-Called Negro Concept"

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