

# The Association of Black Psychologists: An Organization Dedicated to Social Justice

The Counseling Psychologist  
40(5) 656-674

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0011000012450417

<http://tcp.sagepub.com>



Ezemenari M. Obasi<sup>1</sup>, Suzette L. Speight<sup>2</sup>,  
Daryl M. Rowe<sup>3</sup>, Le Ondra Clark<sup>4</sup>,  
and Laura Turner-Essel<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) was founded on September 2, 1968, in San Francisco, California, in response to the American Psychological Association's failure to address the mental health needs of the Black community. This revolutionary idea was borne out of the efforts of Black early career psychologists and student activists from across the United States. ABPsi, as the first national ethnic psychological association, has led the field of psychology in the areas of racial/ethnic identity, cultural psychology, multicultural competencies, positive psychology, and social justice. ABPsi publishes a peer-reviewed journal (*Journal of Black Psychology*) and a quarterly newsletter (*Psych Discourse*). More recently, ABPsi has established a licensing, certification, and proficiency program in African-centered Black psychology. A brief history of ABPsi and its relationship to the field of counseling psychology is discussed.

---

<sup>1</sup>The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, USA

<sup>3</sup>Pepperdine University, Malibu, California, USA

<sup>4</sup>UCLA—Mattel Children's Hospital, Los Angeles, California, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Ezemenari M. Obasi, University of Georgia, Department of Counseling and Human Development Services, 402 Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30602, USA.

Email: [obasi@uga.edu](mailto:obasi@uga.edu)

## Keywords

ABPsi, black psychology, African psychology, licensure, social justice

During the 1960s, the United States of America began to experience an unparalleled decade of sociocultural revolution that had a significant impact on all walks of life. For people of African descent, this decade exhibited a resurgence of Black nationalism. More specifically, a Black Civil Rights Movement had gained momentum, over 30 African countries were gaining their independence, there was a new sound of music with the establishment of Motown Records, and ultimately an unapologetic pride of being Black. Whether it was the oration of the likes of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, or Huey P. Newton; the musical voices of Marvin Gaye, The Jackson 5, The Supremes, or Stevie Wonder; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voting Rights Act of 1965; the boxing sensation Muhammad Ali or the 1968 Olympics Black Power salute by Tommie Smith and John Carlos after medaling in the 200 m sprint, people of African descent began to re-inspire a sense of somebodyness. They began to embody James Brown's lyrics: "Say it loud . . . I'm Black and I'm proud." There was a growing energy and boldness that transcended the apathetic complacency that resulted from centuries of survival in an oppressive nation. This decade was also marked with the heart piercing assassinations of Patrice Lumumba, Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Fred Hampton. The release of suppressed anger in response to unrelenting experiences of discrimination was displayed in uprisings all across the country (e.g., Detroit, Newark, Washington, D.C., Watts). It was in this spirit of demanding social justice for people of African descent that the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) was founded.

## Brief History of ABPsi

The ABPsi was founded on September 2, 1968, in San Francisco, California, in response to (1) the American Psychological Association's (APA) failure to relate to the needs of the Black community, (2) APA's abuse of the Black community as a research resource, and (3) APA's failure to expend any of its resources to eradicate racism within the White community (Williams, 1974). The founders of ABPsi felt that Blacks had been systematically excluded from the field of psychology and portrayed in the research literature as being deficient, and in some cases, inferior to their White counterparts. In "A Petition of Concerns" that was submitted to the APA during its annual meeting

in 1968, ABPsi identified three problems that demanded immediate attention: (1) the paucity of Black psychologists and Black students (graduate and undergraduate) in psychology programs, (2) the failure of APA to address prominent social ailments like poverty and racism, and (3) the lack of representation of Black psychologists in the APA organizational structure.

According to Thomas Parham, a counseling psychologist and past president of ABPsi, the ABPsi membership continues to wrestle with the various tensions that parallel some of the ideological variations that exist in the Black community (October 1, 2009, personal communication). On the one hand, there are some ABPsi members that see value in integrating the organization's efforts into the broader APA multicultural framework. Such an integrationist ideology is similar to the ideas espoused by Frederick Douglas, Martin L. King, Jr., and Booker T. Washington, to name a few. Conversely, there is an ABPsi contingency that resonates more with the philosophical ideas espoused by Martin Delaney, Marcus Garvey, and Malcolm X. This ideological position of Black Nationalism makes the case for the need of ABPsi to remain an autonomous organization whose mission is driven by the needs of the Black community and implemented in ways that are consistent with an African worldview. Despite such tensions, ABPsi made a conscious decision to embrace a self-determination approach toward establishing its autonomy. The reader is referred to the works of Williams (1974, 2008a, 2008b) for a detailed articulation of the formation of ABPsi.

### *Student Contributions to the Development of ABPsi*

It is important to note that ABPsi was borne out of the efforts of young Black psychologists and student organizers. Shortly after the formation of ABPsi, the Black Student Psychology Association (BSPA) was formed. The BSPA represented a more progressive and radical approach to change. They believed that students were both linked to and distinct from Black psychologists, and they needed a forum to discuss student-centered concerns (A. Ajamu, July 1, 2009, personal communication). In 1969, the BSPA joined with the ABPsi to protest at APA. During the APA presidential address, Black students lined up in front of the podium before taking the microphone from the president of APA, George Miller. The students shared their frustrations with APA's perceived lack of effort to address the needs of the Black community as well as the needs specific to Black psychology students. Following this protest, ABPsi drafted a 10-Point Program (see Williams, 1974, 2008a, 2008b) for APA to address and implement. This program illustrated the needs of Black students and called for APA and academic institutions

to adopt a program to address the inequities in the recruitment, mentorship, financial support, and retention of Black students. Of the 300 psychology departments that the plan targeted, 35 adopted the entire program. Many psychology departments rejected this 10-point program on the grounds of not wanting to commit to a 20% quota of Black graduate students (Williams, 2008a, 2008b), but were willing to address other concerns that were raised in the plan. Despite such resistance, the impact of the plan became evident as the admission rates of Black students into psychology programs grew nationwide.

An additional outcome was the creation of the Commission for Accelerating Black Participation in Psychology (CABPP), which allowed ABPsi, BSPA, and APA to have a forum to discuss issues pertinent to Black students' development. The CABPP also facilitated the creation of the Black Visiting Scientist Program, which allowed ABPsi leaders the opportunity to travel to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to impart information about the importance and the possibility of becoming a Black psychologist (Williams, 2008a, 2008b).

### *Association of Black Psychologists*

While the formation of ABPsi served as an impetus for the outgrowth of other ethnic psychological associations, it was a novel experience for these founders. It took a lot of courage for many of these first-generation psychologists to critique the legitimacy of the field of psychology in serving the needs of the Black community. Such a critique by underrepresented populations was unprecedented. Of note, this was the same field of study in which they worked so hard to earn a degree. This was the same degree that many of their families saw as a key toward upward mobility. A once clear destiny involving integration into the psychology profession was now filled with domestic question marks. Where does one go from here? How does one balance the security of providing for one's family with the idea of revolutionizing a new psychology that speaks to the Black experience—a new psychology that doesn't exist? For some it was about the generation of a positive self-concept, a regaining of one's destiny, and reclamation of power over one's life (J. L. White, August 1, 2009, personal communication).

During the 1970 convention, Robert Williams cautioned ABPsi "to break the quasi-dependency and symbiotic relationship with APA" (Williams, 2008a). At this convention, Wade Nobles also introduced the notion of using African philosophy to serve as the foundation for an African psychology that is rooted in the experience of African people. This convention represented an important turning point for ABPsi. First, it decided as an organization to no

longer schedule its conventions to coincide with APA. Second, it broke its ties with APA and developed into an independent and autonomous professional organization that had its own board of directors, mission, and ideology. Finally, it began to lay the groundwork for the development of an African/Black psychology. Members of ABPsi began to study African/African American culture, history, philosophy, literature, and traditional healing practices, in addition to immersing themselves in the Black community and institutions in order to create a liberating and more positive psychology.

In subsequent years, ABPsi continued to grow and so did its student membership. Under the leadership of Dennis Chestnut, Halford Fairchild, and Lisa Whitten, a resolution was co-sponsored and passed to have a Student Division in ABPsi. The rationale for creating the Student Division stemmed from the need to have a section within the growing ABPsi organization that specifically addressed the needs of Black psychology students. This Student Division operated for 20 years before being re-conceptualized and restructured as the ABPsi Student Circle (A. Ajamu, November 1, 2008, personal communication). It was envisioned that the student members of ABPsi would function like a circle, which has no beginning and no end. Like the sacred circle, the goal of the Student Circle was to bring new life to those that they serve.

### *Current Status and Resources*

The evolution from a reactive to a more self-determining and self-defining organization is key in understanding the current mission of ABPsi. "The Association of Black Psychologists sees its mission and destiny as the liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivenment(sic) and illumination of the African Spirit" (ABPsi, 2010). The organization is committed to enhancing scholarship, promoting the professional development of its members, and developing new theories and interventions. Furthermore, ABPsi and its members are specifically, purposefully, and unapologetically committed to enhancing the quality of life for people of African descent in the United States and throughout the Diaspora.

The purpose of ABPsi includes (1) the promotion and advancement of African psychology, (2) an interest in influencing and effecting social change, and (3) the development of programs whereby psychologists of African descent can assist in addressing problems experienced by the Black community (ABPsi, 2010). According to the ABPsi Ethical Standards of Black Psychologists, "the objective of a Black psychologist is to restore the Black mind to its original form, prior to the intrusion of slavery, by cultivating the integrity, the dignity, the collective awareness and the unified movement of Black people towards their social, political, economic, psychological, and

spiritual liberation.” Intrinsic in the mission of ABPsi is the recognition that I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am. This communalistic worldview provides the impetus of a collective responsibility by its membership. It demands that new paradigms be developed that reflect the sociocultural reality of African people throughout the Diaspora. Additionally, ABPsi provides intellectual stimulation, professional development, and a forum where people of African descent can affiliate with like-minded professionals (T. A. Parham, October 1, 2009, personal communication).

ABPsi has significantly increased the enrollment of Black students in the field of psychology (Warfield-Coppock, 1984). This has, in turn, led to a significant increase of Black psychologists in the United States. ABPsi has held national conventions on an annual basis since its inception in 1968. These conventions have convened in Black-owned community centers, upscale hotels, and convention centers across the United States. International conventions were also held in Ocho Rios (Jamaica 1990), Toronto (Canada 1993), and Accra (Ghana 2000) after the Board of Directors decided to retrace the steps of the underground railroad. ABPsi publishes a quarterly news journal (see *Psych Discourse* below) and an authoritative scientific journal (see *Journal of Black Psychology* below) that is published four times a year. Additionally, members of ABPsi have written hundreds of books, thousands of articles, and have advanced the development of a discipline in the area of African/Black psychology (Warfield-Coppock, 1984). According to Karenga (1995), such a discipline is achieved through “(1) a severe critique and rejection of White psychology, in terms of its methodology, conclusions and the ideological premises on which it rests; (2) provision of Afrocentric models of study and therapy; and (3) self-conscious intervention in the social struggle for a more Black and human environment” (p. 21).

Of note, ABPsi established an “African Healers Association Covenant” with the Ghana National Association of Traditional Healers with the purpose of jointly exploring the promotion, advancement, and utilization of traditional African healing sciences. ABPsi has partnered with George Roberts and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to engage communities in HIV/AIDS education and prevention. ABPsi has also influenced public policy in the areas of substance abuse and standardized testing (see *Larry P. v. California*, 1979). Overall, ABPsi has developed into an international organization that is committed to addressing the needs of African people throughout the Diaspora.

### *Journal of Black Psychology*

The first article written in the area of African/Black psychology was not published in a scientific journal. *Toward a Black Psychology* (White, 1980/1970)

was purposefully published in *Ebony Magazine*—a broadly circulated publication—in the spirit of bringing much-needed information to the people in a way that was both relevant and meaningful to the Black community. This monumental publication set the stage for this emerging discipline. Guided by the leadership of Robert Williams and Reginald Jones, the *Journal of Black Psychology (JBP)* was established by ABPsi in 1974. The first editor of *JBP* was William Smith at the University of Cincinnati. *JBP* has provided a forum for the psychological study of Black populations since its inception. Its aim was and continues to be the publication of scholarly psychological works that assist professionals in understanding the experiences and behaviors of Black populations. These works include studies of a qualitative, quantitative, theoretical, and conceptual nature as well as brief reports and book reviews. *JBP*'s 20-person editorial board strives to publish high-quality articles that reflect the evolving standards and advancing sophistication of available research methods in African/Black psychology. The journal remains a popular publication outlet for new and experienced researchers conducting strong empirical research with populations of African descent. Kevin Cokley, a counseling psychologist, is the current editor of *JBP*.

Many psychology departments continue to fail to acknowledge the intellectual impact that *JBP* has on the field of psychology. It is not uncommon for junior faculty to be encouraged to publish in “more prestigious” journals—often code for APA journals—as they matriculate through the tenure and promotion process. One metric used to determine the relevance of professional journals is the impact factor, which ranks journals by measuring the frequency with which the average article in the journal has been cited in a particular year. Under the editorship of Shawn Utsey—a counseling psychologist—*JBP* began to be listed in the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI): Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). In 2009, *JBP* received an impact factor of 1.55, which placed it 36th in a ranking of 112 multidisciplinary psychology journals (Thomson Reuters, 2008). This represents a steady increase since *JBP* received its first impact factor of 0.86 in 2007 and 0.98 in 2008 (Thomson Reuters, 2008).

### *Psych Discourse*

*Psych Discourse* is the official monthly news journal of the Association of Black Psychology, which currently serves as the primary vehicle for communication among the organization's membership. *Psych Discourse*, under the direction of Halford Fairchild, really became the mouthpiece of ABPsi while providing financial support from the revenue generated from advertisements. Students and early career professionals within the organization are especially called to contribute to the publication with

articles related to their work and research interests. In addition, ABPsi members are encouraged to submit articles expressing views and positions on any wide range of topics (economic, political, professional, and so forth) that have an impact on the Black community.

Each edition of *Psych Discourse* revolves around a feature topic. In addition, regular sections include “Perspective” (member commentary on current issues), “Harambee” (the official newsletter of the ABPsi Student Circle), “Conversations With the Elders” (where elders within the field of psychology share their wisdom and insight regarding various topics), “Drum Call” (a listing of current professional and community events), “Akoben” (a summary of global, national, and local news events that call for psychologist involvement), and “Healing the Healer” (a section devoted to strategies of self-care and self-reflection). Sections of the publication are intended to be reflective of the organization’s African-centered ideology and cultural values. Through these features, *Psych Discourse* aims to both stimulate deep thought and promote professional growth within its readers (K. Washington, 2009). Its role as a linkage point for ABPsi membership is fulfilled as members around the world are kept abreast of organizational issues and activities.

### *African Psychology Institute*

In 1979, Louis Ramey—Director of the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB) minority mental health program—established the Black Psychology Task Force. This collective constituted community members, psychologists, and students from the SREB project. The meeting of this group occurred at “The Atlanta Summit on African Psychology” (African Psychology Institute, 1982, p. ix), with the members of the first African Psychology Institute (API) emerging from the Task Force, in 1981 (Kambon, 1998). The mission and objectives of ABPsi’s African Psychology Institute were to (1) introduce African psychology concepts, (2) examine applicability of these concepts for understanding African American behavior, and (3) develop skills for increasing effectiveness in providing education, social and health services, and research for African Americans. With this foundation, ABPsi began to design a training curriculum in Black/African psychology in the spirit of providing culturally competent services and conducting culturally informed research with people of African descent.

In 1982, the API published *The African Psychology Institute Training Module Handbook* to clarify the African psychology paradigm. The handbook summarizes various components of the training in African psychology, including basic concepts and assumptions; personality order and disorder; family and community life; a glossary of terms; a bibliography and additional

recommended readings; an appendix, containing several tables and schematics depicting theoretical advances; and a directory of API faculty. There were several critical effects of the original API. First, this founding generation of African/Black psychologists carved out discursive space to imagine the contours of a psychology that emerged from the cultural wellspring of persons of African descent. In doing so, they reasserted the centrality of an African ethos and reality for apprehending the behavior of African peoples (Belgrave & Allison, 2006). Second, they set forth a framework that would serve as the generative seed for subsequent inquiries into a culturally grounded psychology for African people. That framework included the notions that African life was extended—collective and holistic; that a natural order was real, suggesting the essentiality of spirit for understanding human agency; and that to understand a person, we must see him or her within the merging contexts of family and community (Grills, 2004; Nobles & Goddard, 1993). In addition, the glossary they provided immersed countless students and colleagues into the study of African history, culture, proverbs, medicine/healing, and spirituality to resurrect African ideals for human agency.

In 1993, Daryl Rowe—a counseling psychologist—was appointed Chair of the Committee to Advance African Psychology (CAAP) of the ABPsi's General Assembly and was charged with the task of designing, reviewing, refining, and implementing programs to advance the science of African-centered psychology. Beginning in 1994, ABPsi members were exposed to historical and contemporary refinements related to African-centered psychology (ACP) at the annual conventions (Rowe, 1994). The API organized a training model for preparing mental health professionals to work more effectively with African descent populations utilizing assumptions, methodologies, and intervention modalities derived specifically from African principles, processes, and realities. Through the API, a model has been developed for mastering appropriate insight, content, and style so that the articulation, development, and practice of a more authentic application of ACP by African-descent psychologists occurs (Rowe, 1995). The overall mission of the API is to (1) establish the parameters of a common foundation of knowledge necessary for articulating African-centered psychology, (2) offer a training program in African-centered psychology, and (3) certify and/or credential psychologists to meet the psycho-cultural needs of African peoples (Rowe & Kambon, 1999; Rowe & Webb-Msemaji, 2004).

### *Licensing, Certification, and Proficiency Program*

In 2005 James Savage, outgoing president of the ABPsi, initiated the Licensing, Certification and Proficiency Program (LCPP). Following a

2-year planning process that built upon the earlier work of the API, the LCPP was formally adopted in 2007. The aims of the LCPP are to establish baseline standards and knowledge base to define ACP; authorize the ABPsi as the professional governing body for overseeing competence for addressing the needs of persons of African descent; create a framework for recognizing proficiency in ACP; and administer the implementation, application, and review procedures for certification in ACP (ABPsi, 2007a, 2007b).

The initial phase of certification has focused primarily on grandfathering—certifying mental health professionals based on their accumulated expertise in the emerging field of ACP. The grandfathering period closed in August 2009, and to date more than 40 psychologists have been grandfathered into the ABPsi Board Certification in ACP at either the Fellow or Diplomat status (<http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/abpsi-certification>). In addition, ongoing training has been occurring through the ABPsi International Congress on Licensure, Certification, and Proficiency in Black psychology held in conjunction with the ABPsi International Convention for the past 5 years. Numerous psychologists and other mental health professionals have been acquiring requisite training and continuing education to prepare for eventual certification.

The primary challenges for the LCPP are to clarify, strengthen, and refine curricular aims such that applicants for certification in ACP are exposed to the latest developments of ACP. A systematic training paradigm that leads to mastering appropriate insight, content, and style must be developed, so that the articulation, development, and practice of more authentic applications of ACP can occur (Rowe, 2007). A clear emphasis of the curriculum must include a re-grounding of participants in the accumulated history, culture, and behavioral expressions of people of African descent. Moving forward, more coordination between the LCPP and API needs to come about, such that the API serves as the training arm for the ABPsi, insuring that coursework in ACP is available in a timely fashion to persons seeking certification. LCPP and the API should work in unison to advance the science of ACP and to certify end-users of ACP.

## **Connections to the Society of Counseling Psychology**

As stated previously, ABPsi is an independent and autonomous national organization that is committed to the liberation of African people throughout the Diaspora. Since 1970, ABPsi has not had any formal relationship with the American Psychological Association (APA) or any of its subsidiary divisions. That being said, there are many counseling psychologists and students

who carry memberships in ABPsi, APA, and the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP). Unlike APA, ABPsi doesn't have divisions that characterize subdisciplines (i.e., Society of Counseling Psychology) or topic areas (i.e., Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues). By extension, it is often the case that one's identity as a counseling psychologist is not the most salient identity when contributing to the mission of ABPsi.

## Counseling Psychologists Within ABPsi

### Service

Counseling psychologists have recently served on the ABPsi Board of Directors in the capacity of President (i.e., Benson G. Cooke and Thomas A. Parham), Regional Representatives (i.e., Mark Bolden, Kevin Cokley, and Daryl Rowe), Elder-of-Elders (i.e., Paris M. Finner-Williams and William Thomas), General Assembly Chairperson (i.e., Le Ondra Clark), and Student Circle Chairperson (i.e., Le Ondra Clark, *Ma'at E. Lewis*, Ezemenari M. Obasi, Bedford F. Palmer, and Chatee' Richardson), to name a few. Counseling psychologists have also recently served as Editor-in-Chief (i.e., Kevin Cokley and Shawn Utsey) and members of the Editorial Board (i.e., LaVerne A. Berkel, Leon Caldwell, Madonna Constantine, William E. Cross, A. J. Franklin, Janet Helms, Carla Hunter, Michael Mobley, Helen Neville, Ezemenari M. Obasi, Thomas A. Parham, Suzette L. Speight, Anita Jones Thomas, Ivory Toldson, Beverly Vandiver, etc.) of the *Journal of Black Psychology*. While detailing a comprehensive list of counseling psychologists who have significantly contributed to ABPsi in elected and appointed positions is beyond the scope of this article, several of them have been highlighted throughout this article.

### Scholarship

Counseling psychology members of ABPsi have amassed a body of literature that has had a profound impact on the field of psychology as a whole. *The Psychology of Blacks: An African Centered Perspective* (Parham, White, & Ajamu, 2000), *Counseling Persons of African Descent: Raising the Bar of Practitioner Competence* (Parham, 2002), and the *Handbook of African American Psychology* (Neville, Tynes, & Utsey, 2009) are arguably some of the most definitive introductory textbooks for learning about African/Black psychology. Additionally, counseling psychology members of ABPsi have significantly contributed to theory development and research in the areas of racial identity (Cokley, 2005, 2007, Cross, 1971, 1991; Parham & Helms, 1981); multicultural training, counseling, and competencies (Berkel,

Constantine, Olson, & Fisher, 2007; Constantine, 2002; Constantine & Ladany, 2000; Neville et al., 1996; Speight, Myers, Cox, & Highlen, 1991); racism, racial attitudes, and race-related stress (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000; Thompson & Neville, 1999; Utsey & Hook, 2007; Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996); worldview (Obasi, Flores, & James-Myers, 2009); acculturation (Obasi & Leong, 2009, 2010); social justice (Speight & Vera, 2004, 2008); and African American gender issues (Franklin, 1999, 2004; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004, 2008; Thompson, Worthington, & Atkinson, 1994), to name a few.

## **Implications for ABPsi and SCP: Framing a Social Justice Agenda for People of African Descent**

The very formation of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) itself provides the road map for considering and confronting issues of equity and justice for people of African descent. Frustration with decades of malicious neglect coalesced into the development of an independent professional organization for Black psychologists to effectively advance and address the needs of the Black community. The original aim was to “have a positive impact upon the mental health of the national Black community by means of planning, programs, services, training, and advocacy” (ABPsi, 2010). This unique socio-cultural-historical context provided the crucible for the founding of an organization committed to social change, thus making ABPsi and its progeny—African/Black psychology—distinctive (Khatib, 1980). African/Black psychology provides an alternative to the deficit approach that is prevalent in mainstream psychology. White (1980/1970) asserted that “it is very difficult if not impossible to understand the lifestyles of black people using traditional psychological theories developed by white psychologists to explain white behaviors” (p. 5). Thus, African/Black psychology set out to provide culturally relevant and consistent explanations, analyses, and theories of the behavior of people of African descent based upon a Black frame of reference. Over the years, African/Black psychology has shifted to a more African-centered approach grounded in African culture, spirituality, philosophy, and history (Parham, 2009). Ultimately, members of ABPsi acknowledged that they were “Black people first and psychologists second” (Williams, 1974, p. 11).

Social justice is the *raison d'être* for ABPsi—the liberation and empowerment of people of African descent. Social justice—that is, the elimination of

social inequities, the dismantling of systems of oppression, and the liberation of those oppressed—is the foundation upon which ABPsi was formed. Theorists from W.E. B. DuBois, Franz Fanon, and Paulo Freire to Linda James Myers, Wade Nobles, and Naim Akbar all have described the damaging psychological effects of oppression and prescribed a process of liberation where the formerly oppressed develop a sense of self that promotes resistance to their oppression. Liberation is a process of overcoming both the internal and external sources of domination and subjugation. ABPsi has a pivotal and unique role to play in the liberation struggle by providing education, interventions, and research from a psychological frame of reference to aid the Black community as it resists oppression. “Black psychologists as healers could not simply talk about liberation, they had to become liberators” (Parham et al., 2000, p. 22).

Over 30 years ago, Smith (1973) called on Black psychologists to show courage and be change agents within their communities supporting and advancing the self-determination of Black people. Similarly Baldwin’s (1989) challenge to Black psychologists/ABPsi members to lead in the struggle for the liberation of Black people resonates even more loudly some 24 years later. He specifically asked Black psychologists “how our plight as a race of people has become so dismal if we Black psychologist have been doing our job in providing relevant, meaningful psychological leadership and direction for our people” (p. 72). While Baldwin (now Kambon) is addressing psychologists of African descent (ABPsi members), his question resonates more broadly to all psychologists committed to social justice. Social problems like high school dropout rates, suicide, HIV/AIDS, foster care, substance abuse, obesity, intimate partner violence, and academic achievement, for instance, continue to plague the Black community. Have these psychosocial issues improved under our watch? What more can we do individually and collectively through ABPsi?

Members of the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP), who are not members of ABPsi, could certainly join as allies in coalition with ABPsi as it seeks to carry out its mission. Given its unique history and perspective, ABPsi can play a leadership role in “articulating a new vision for society a society free of racial, gender and class exploitation” (Parham et al., 2000, p. 158). By partnering with other professional, grassroots, and community-based organizations, ABPsi and SCP can participate in comprehensive, holistic approaches to addressing the multiple social ills while developing prevention efforts that build on the strengths of the Black community. Additionally, SCP can take a leadership role in advancing the notion that theories, research, and intervention programs that have been developed by

ABPsi's membership be integrated in the classrooms, practicum training sites, research, and clinics, while simultaneously being visible in SCP conference programming and scholarly publications. Oftentimes, associations like ABPsi are presented as exotic, extra, supplemental, and/or ancillary. This fosters a generic approach to counseling psychology research and practice that is advanced through a "universalistic" frame of view. This imposed ethic that is grounded in the collective theories, practices, and policies of people of European descent can therefore leave many students and professionals unexposed to the existence, scope, and history of ABPsi.

ABPsi has been committed to a strength-based model for people of African descent that includes constructs like "improvisation, resilience, spirituality, connectedness to others, emotional vitality and gallows humor" (J. L. White, October 1, 2009, personal communication). It is important to note that this strength-based philosophical shift was novel and took place long before positive psychology came into vogue. Obviously, there is more work for ABPsi to do. As an organization of experts in human behavior, ABPsi stands to make important contributions to understanding the psychological impact of social problems such as unemployment, poverty, health disparities, racism, and sexism. The "founding fathers and mothers provided a framework for ABPsi to exist until the disparities in mental health, academia, and research concerning the African American community are erased" (Holmes, 2009, p. 4). Given the sheer scope of the myriad of issues facing the African American community, there is also plenty of work to be done by those committed to social justice. It is important to note that several ABPsi members have developed some outstanding programs that have made a positive impact in the community: Bakari Project (Parham), HAWK Federation (Nobles), Imoyase Group (Grills), NTU Psychology (Philips), and Optimal Psychology (Myers), to name a few. The current challenge is to take best practices from such community-based programs and expand their reach across the nation.

Key to the future of ABPsi is the attraction and retention of new generations of members. In Coleman and Johnson's (2009) interviews with four prominent African American psychologists (three who were past ABPsi Presidents), one of the main themes was an emphasis on training future psychologists to play significant roles in academia, mental health settings, and within communities. In recent years, early career professionals and students have begun to voice their readiness to increasingly contribute to ABPsi's mission (Obasi, Prince, Bolden, Richardson, & Walker, 2005). In this spirit, one of the stated objectives of ABPsi's President, Benson G. Cooke—a counseling psychologist—is to establish ABPsi as "a major forum that facilitates the preparation of our next generation of future thinkers, scholars, healers, and leaders" (Cooke, 2009, p. 5).

In conclusion, ABPsi has many invaluable resources upon which to draw, such as its rich history and culture, annual conventions, Council of Elders, the *Journal of Black Psychology*, and *Psych Discourse*. Similar to other professional organizations, it has challenges to confront—sluggish economy, membership growth, and the incorporation of new technologies and social media for real-time communication. “ABPsi is a vital and necessary resource” (Parham, et al., 2000, p. 17) whose potential is boundless. The ultimate success of ABPsi will be measured by how the lives of people of African descent are improved, enhanced, and transformed through the research, theory, micro-level and macro-level interventions, and advocacy efforts of the organization. As Stanly Crockett correctly noted in 1970, “hard work rather than rhetoric will enable us to justify the existence of ABPsi” (Williams, 1974).

### **Acknowledgments**

While the authors have held significant leadership positions in ABPsi, this article does not represent an official document of the ABPsi.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **References**

- The African Psychology Institute. (1982). *The African Psychology Institute training module handbook*. Tallahassee, FL: North Florida Chapter, The Association of Black Psychologists.
- Association of Black Psychologists. (2007a). *LCPP list of ABPsi CAC/BP certificants*. Retrieved August 19, 2009, from <http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/abpsi-certification>
- Association of Black Psychologists. (2007b). *The licensure, certification, and proficiency program of the Association of Black Psychologists, Inc: LCPP policy manual*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Association of Black Psychologists. (2010). *ABPsi history*. Retrieved December 15, 2010, from <http://www.abpsi.org/index.php/about-abpsi>
- Baldwin, J. A. (1989). The role of Black psychologists in Black liberation. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 16(1), 67-76.

- Belgrave, F. Z., & Allison, K. W. (2006). *African American psychology: From Africa to America*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Berkel, L. A., Constantine, M. G., Olson, E. A., & Fisher, R. (2007). Supervisor multicultural competence: Addressing religion and spirituality in counseling training. *Clinical Supervisor, 26*, 3-15.
- Cokley, K. (2005). Racial(ized) identity, ethnic identity, and Afrocentric values: Conceptual and methodological challenges in understanding African American identity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 517-526.
- Cokley, K. (2007). Critical issues in the measurement of ethnic and racial identity: A referendum on the state of the field. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 54*, 224-234.
- Coleman, M. N., & Johnson, A. J. (2009). Sankofa: History of and aspirations for Black psychology through the eyes of our elders. In H. A. Neville, B. M. Tynes, & S. O. Utsey (Eds.), *Handbook of African American psychology* (pp. 19-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Constantine, M. G. (2002). Predictors of satisfaction with counseling: Racial and ethnic minority client's attitudes toward counseling and ratings of their counselors' general and multicultural counseling competence. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 49*(2), 255-263.
- Constantine, M. G., & Ladany, N. (2000). Self-report multicultural counseling competence scales: Their relation to social desirability attitudes and multicultural case conceptualization ability. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 47*(2), 155-164.
- Cooke, B. G. (2009). A challenge for early and midcareer psychologists and students of psychology: Preparing for the next generation. *Psych Discourse, 43*(1), 5-8.
- Cross, W. E., Jr. (1971). The Negro-to-Black conversion experience. *Black World, 20*(9), 13-27.
- Cross, W. E., Jr. (1991). *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Franklin, A. J. (1999). Invisibility syndrome and racial identity development in psychotherapy and counseling African American men. *The Counseling Psychologist, 27*(6), 761-793.
- Franklin, A. J. (2004). *From brotherhood to manhood: How Black men rescue their relationships and dreams from the invisibility syndrome*. New York: John Wiley & Son.
- Grills, C. N. (2004). African psychology. In R. Jones (Ed), *Black psychology* (4th ed., pp. 171-208). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.
- Holmes, D. A. (2009). Future of ABPsi. *Psych Discourse, 43*(1), 4.
- Kambon, K. K. (1998). *African/Black psychology in the American context: An African-centered approach*. Tallahassee, FL: Nubian Nation Publications.
- Karenga, M. (1995). Black psychology. In K. P. Monteiro (Ed.), *Ethnicity and psychology: African-, Asian-, Latino- and Native-American psychologies* (rev. ed., pp. 21-39). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

- Khatib, S. M. (1980). Black studies and the study of Black people: Reflections on the distinctive characteristics of Black psychology. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 48-55). New York: Harper & Row.
- Neville, H. A., Heppner, M. J., Louie, C. E., Thompson, C. E., Brooks, L., & Baker, C. E. (1996). The impact of multicultural training on White racial identity attitudes and therapy competencies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 27*(1), 83-89.
- Neville, H. A., Lilly, R. L., Duran, G., Lee, R. M., & Browne, L. (2000). Construction and initial validation of the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 47*(1), 59-70.
- Neville, H. A., Tynes, B. M., & Utsey, S. O. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of African American psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Nobles, W., & Goddard, L. (1993). An African-centered model of prevention for African American youth at high risk. In L. Goddard (Ed.), *An African-centered model of prevention for African-American youth at high risk* (pp. 115-129). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Obasi, E. M., Flores, L. Y., & James-Myers, L. (2009). Construction and initial validation of the Worldview Analysis Scale. *Journal of Black Studies, 39*(6), 937-961.
- Obasi, E. M., & Leong, F. T. L. (2009). Psychological distress, acculturation, and mental health seeking attitudes among people of African descent in the United States: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 56*(2), 227-238.
- Obasi, E. M., & Leong, F. T. L. (2010). Construction and validation of the Measurement of Acculturation Strategies for People of African Descent (MASPAD). *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 16*(4), 526-539.
- Obasi, E. M., Prince, K. J., Bolden, M., Richardson, C., & Walker, R. L. (2005). Akoben: A battle cry for ABPsi's re-awakening. *Psych Discourse, 39*(6), 4-9.
- Parham, T. A. (Ed.). (2002). *Counseling persons of African descent: Raising the bar of practitioner competence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Parham, T. A. (2009). Foundations for an African American psychology: Extending roots to an ancient Kemetite past. In H. A. Neville, B. M. Tynes, & S. O. Utsey (Eds.), *Handbook of African American psychology* (pp. 3-18). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Parham, T. A., & Helms, J. E. (1981). The influence of Black students' racial identity attitudes on preference for counselor's race. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, 250-258.
- Parham, T. A., White, J. L., & Ajamu, A. (2000). *The psychology of Blacks: An African-centered perspective* (3rd. Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rowe, D. M. (1994). Revisiting the African Psychology Institute: Pre-convention activities, 1994. *Psych Discourse, 25*(7), 15-16.

- Rowe, D. M. (1995). The African Psychology Institute: A conceptual overview. *Psych Discourse, 26*(6), 15-16.
- Rowe, D. M., & Kambon, M. (1999). A curriculum in African psychology: Courses offered for continuing education. *Psych Discourse, 30*(9), 7-10.
- Rowe, D. M., & Webb-Msemaji, F. (2004). African-centered psychology in the community. In R. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (4th ed., pp. 701-721). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry Publishers.
- Rowe, T. D. (2007). Developing a curriculum in African/Black psychology for the Certification and Proficiency Program (CPP). *Psych Discourse, 40*(6), 7-10.
- Smith, P. M. (1973). Black psychologist as a change agent in the Black community. *Journal of Black Studies, 4*(1), 41-51.
- Speight, S. L., Myers, L. J., Cox, C. I., & Highlen, P. S. (1991). A redefinition of multicultural counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 70*, 29-36.
- Speight, S. L., & Vera, E. M. (2004). Social justice: Ready, or not? *The Counseling Psychologist, 32*(1), 109-118.
- Speight, S. L., & Vera, E. M. (2008). Social justice and counseling psychology: A challenge to the specialty. In S. D. Brown & R. Lent (Eds.), *The handbook of counseling psychology* (4th ed., pp. 54-67). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.
- Thomas, A. J., Witherspoon, K. M., & Speight, S. L. (2004). Toward the development of the stereotypic roles for Black Women Scale. *Journal of Black Psychology, 30*, 426-442.
- Thomas, A. J., Witherspoon, K. M., & Speight, S. L. (2008). Gendered racism, psychological symptoms, and coping of African American women. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 14*, 307-314.
- Thompson, C. E., & Neville, H. A. (1999). Racism, mental health, and mental health practice. *The Counseling Psychologist, 27*(2), 155-223.
- Thompson, C. E., Worthington, R., & Atkinson, D. R. (1994). Counselor content orientation, counselor race, and Black women's cultural mistrust and self-disclosures. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 41*(2), 155-161.
- Thomson Reuters. (2008). *Journal citation 2009 reports*. Philadelphia: Author.
- Utsey, S. O., & Hook, J. N. (2007). Heart rate variability as a physiological moderator of the relationship between race-related stress and psychological distress. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 13*, 250-253.
- Utsey, S. O., & Ponterotto, J. G. (1996). Development and validation of the index of race-related stress (IRRS). *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 43*(4), 490-501.
- Warfield-Coppock, N. (1984). *An organization history of the Association of Black Psychologists*. Washington, DC: The Association of Black Psychologists.
- Washington, D. (2009). Decisions, dilemmas, and divine destiny: On Black manhood in America. *Psych Discourse, 43*(3), 5-7.

- Washington, K. (2009). Note from the editor. *Psych Discourse*, 43(1), 3.
- White, J. L. (1980/1970). Toward a Black psychology. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 5-12). New York: Harper & Row.
- Williams, R. L. (1974). A history of the Association of Black Psychologists: Early formation and development. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 1(1), 9-24.
- Williams, R. L. (2008a). A 40 year history of the Association of Black Psychologists. *The Journal of Black Psychology*, 34, 249-260.
- Williams, R. L. (2008b). *The history of the Association of Black Psychologists*. Bloomington, IN: Author House.

## Bios

**Ezemenari M. Obasi** is an Associate Professor at the University of Georgia. His scholarly interests include: African American health disparities, drug and alcohol abuse, social neuroscience, and African psychology. He is a past Chairperson of the ABPsi Student Circle and a current member of the Journal of Black Psychology Editorial Board.

**Suzette L. Speight** is an Assistant Professor at the University of Akron. Her scholarly interest include: multicultural training and multicultural competence, African American women and mental health, the psychological impact of oppression, and African-centered psychology. She is a current member of the Journal of Black Psychology Editorial Board.

**Daryl M. Rowe** is a professor at Pepperdine University. He regularly consults with various local, state and national agencies and organizations regarding cultural diversity issues, working with different clinical populations, alternative approaches to psychotherapy, and other issues that aid the social and interpersonal functioning of persons of African descent. He was the national Chairperson of the African Psychology Institute, the training arm of ABPsi. He is also the incoming President of ABPsi.

**Le Ondra Clark** recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a past Chairperson of the ABPsi Student Circle and the Secretary of the ABPsi General Assembly.

**Laura Turner-Essel** is a doctoral student at the University of Akron. Her research interests include Black identity, internalized racism, and social justice. She is also a contributor to the ABPsi Psych Discourse.