

# **Educating African-Centered Psychologists: Towards a Comprehensive Paradigm**

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**Abstract:** This article has several aims. First, we provide a conceptual relationship for the more than forty year efforts to address the mental health needs of persons of African descent. Second, we advance an African-centered meta-theoretical framework for thinking about human development. Next we develop a theoretical framework for understanding both human development and knowledge acquisition. Finally, we introduce a system for categorizing and codifying the domains of inquiry in the teaching of African-centered psychology.

The critical challenge confronting the current generation of psychologists of African descent is to explicate African cultural realities; to step outside of the limits of western psychology to articulate the meaning of a psychology of African peoples; and to descend into the rich well-spring out of which African conceptions of human behavior emerged. Central to our argument is the idea that African realities – constructions of self, others, the world and cosmos – not only survived, they have thrived and provide the basis of our psychology – an African-centered psychology (Ajamu, 2004; Akbar, 1984, 1985; Asante, 1987, 1990; Clark, McGee, Nobles & Weems, 1975; Grills, 2004; Grills & Rowe, 1998; Nobles, 1986, 1998, 2004; Rowe & Webb-Msemaji, 2004; Obasi & Smith, 2009).

## **Introduction – The Constitution of African-Centered Psychology**

Western articulations of psychology describe it as the study of human behavior and mental processes; rooted in notions of material realities and confirmed through empirical methodologies (Obasi & Smith, 2009). But these definitions are drawn from western memes<sup>1</sup> about, among other things, the nature of the *self*, the purpose of existence, the nature of the cosmos and the self's place within those constructs. Western paradigms have also been expansive about the nature of the *other*, first and foremost as the antithesis of the *self*, which is considered the apotheosis of all beings. Other paradigmatic assumptions about the *other*, particularly the African *other*, include savagery, bestiality, genetic inferiority, hyper-sexuality, intellectual inferiority – the list continues in the same vein (Hilliard, 1997). It is important to understand (and accept) that these ascriptions – these memetic postulates are not apart from the rubric of psychological discourse in the west; they in fact emanate from it. Recent advancements in multiculturalism and laudable efforts of the western psychological community have not supplanted the original racist, xenophobic agenda; it would indeed be impossible to do so in recent history because these memes lie deep in the structures of all thought upon which western psychology is constructed.

A more adequate (i.e., less hegemonic) understanding of psychology is that it is the “study of the human spirit or ... human illumination” (Nobles, 1986, p. 5). As such, it codifies the systems of meaning of human beingness, specifies the features of human functioning and delineates the systems for restoring order to normal/natural human development (Rowe, 1995). From this definition we can begin to speak about an African-centered psychology. Psychology, as we mean it, first and foremost reflects how a people understand and define their human authenticity. Second, it details and differentiates the workings of human agency – in this way psychology distinguishes between human and not-human activity. Lastly, it sets forth an array of methods for closing the gap between a person's agency and the organized or recognized standards of functioning and being, within a community.

An accurate understanding of African-centered psychology (ACP) is also essential in our search for a paradigm through which to conceptualize and teach it, for more than the obvious need to identify categorically what we are teaching. We acknowledge the epistemological certitude that the acquisition of knowledge is in fact the development of identity – in short, learning is identity formation: All knowledge is by its definition transformative; it informs that categories of thinking that provide the constructs of being and doing. Knowledge encodes, enriches and encapsulates memes – those nodes of association, connotation, precept, paradigm and process that cause all knowledge within a particular culture to “make sense”. Cultural knowledge, in order to be knowledge, must possess integrity – frames, forms and formats that create structural synthesis.<sup>2</sup> African-centered learning enhances human *authenticity* (Nobles, 2006); therefore, to effectively situate an appropriate learning arc for those whom we would teach, we must be informed by both an understanding of the development of spirit *and* an understanding of the process of learning.

This idea of authenticity is larger than mere identity development, as we commonly think of it. African American identity theory is limited because it is grounded in Western frames of human functioning – frames that start with the assumption of negativity regarding African human functioning – frames that are superficial and peculiar; and frames that suggest that positive African identity is transitory. Authenticity, however, means that one’s identity is grounded in a collective ethnic and cultural consciousness; thus the cultural resources of a community are the basis for both personal and collective identity (Hilliard, 1997). Authenticity best captures the intent of developing a theory of human beingness that is centered in African realities.

## **African Centered Metatheory**

African-centered metatheory is a meta-theoretical development in the social sciences that addresses the specific sociocultural issues, contexts, strengths and preferences associated with the distinguishing qualities of persons of African descent (Rowe & Rowe, 2009). Thus, African-centered metatheory can explain how African-descent communities change, consistent with our worldviews. Asante (1987, 1990) advanced the notion of *Afrocentricity*, based upon his work in rhetoric, and argued that African ideals and values be placed at the center of discourse involving persons of African descent, culture and behavior; and that Africans are subjects – not objects – in the examination of human ethos. The Afrocentric idea seeks to identify and situate the “location” or subject-place of African people in social, political and cultural discourse. Asante argues that the history, production and place of African people has been defined and controlled by European and EuroAmerican interests and images, which forces Africans (and others) to have a false view of themselves and of their contribution to humanity. The clear identification of African ideals, images and interests as codified in African worldviews and ideologies provides the only clear and consistent template for understanding African reality.

Following Asante's work, a paradigmatic shift occurred regarding the conceptualization of the behavior of persons of African descent. Asante's constructs have been used by scholars in a number of disciplines including education (Murrell, 2002), history (Diop, 1989), African Studies (Karenga, 1993), social work (Schiele, 1996) and psychology (Akbar, 1984; Azibo, 1989; Nobles, 2006).

The shift in psychological discourse resultant from the crystallization of Afrocentricity is particularly illuminating.

"African centeredness represents a concept which categorizes a *"quality of thought and practice"*, is rooted in the cultural image and interest of people of African ancestry and represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of analyses. It represents ... the core and fundamental quality of the *"Belonging," "Being" and "Becoming"* of people of African ancestry. Furthermore, it represents the fact, that as human beings, people of African ancestry have the right and responsibility to "center" themselves in their own subjective possibilities and potentialities, and through the re-centering process reproduce and refine the best of the human essence" (Nobles, 1998, p. 190).

Nobles' definition reflects the scope and expanse of African-centered psychology (ACP). His position is noteworthy on at least two counts. First, as he suggests, Asante's assertion *"relocates the debate"* about the meanings and methods of African-centered psychology, because as opposed to simply mapping out conceptual contours, Nobles, borrowing from Karenga (1993), places emphasis on the *quality* of thought and practice. Nobles' emphasis suggests that the examination into the meaning of human existence, the features of human functioning and the methods for restoring order to human development is the essential task confronting psychologists of African ancestry. Through this examination, we inspire insight, raise new questions, refine methods and practices, and come to know the parameters of human agency, informed by an African fount or column of knowledge.

Based upon twenty-five years of relentless researching and rethinking the epistemological break between western and African cultural paradigms, ACP rests upon four foundational assumptions: 1) it advances the re-ascension of African cultural patterns and styles for understanding human behavior; 2) it reflects the various ways African peoples have sought to understand, articulate and project themselves to themselves, others and the world; 3) it utilizes scientific and moral criteria that emerge out of the study of African cultural patterns; i.e., criteria emphasize values that are more situational, collective, dynamic, and circular assumptions that are more integrative or "diunital," and methods that are more affective, symbolic and metaphorical; or reliant upon an inclusive metaphysical epistemology;

and 4) it verifies the reality of African human processes through an examination of historical moments and movements—relies on African sources, i.e., oral literature (proverbs, songs, tales/stories), spiritual system “scripts,” prayers, praise songs and moral teachings, the dynamic interdependence of community, nature and spirit, and Sankofa (Asante & Abarry, 1996; Rowe & Webb-Msemaji, 2004).

The first step in determining an African-centered theory of the authentic African person is to develop “centered” meta-theory – a system of interlocking, mutually verifying constructs about the nature of human beingness and human functioning upon which theory can then be constructed. According to Rowe & Webb-Msemaji (2004), “centeredness” suggests that scholars should deliberately *locate* their theories, methods and practices within the ever-deepening inquiry into and reclamation of African cultural ways. Thus, ACP is a heuristic to reflect the intention of scholars to inspire new inquiries into and about the psychology of persons of African ancestry. It reflects an intentional alignment with the philosophical, epistemological, intellectual and spiritual structures of African human agency (Obasi & Smith, 2009). To lay claim to being African-centered, scholars must accept the responsibility to address how their work fits within emerging African-centered paradigms. If such effort is absent, it is fair to presume that the scholar’s work does *not* seek to be located within the African-centered archetype.

The second step in determining an African-centered theory of the authentic African person lies in understanding the collective voice of African American psychologists as they have grappled with teasing out what is African, both from preceding psychological discourse and from ancient continental influences.

Both of these thrusts are critically important. We cannot simply lift African rituals and rites from ancient record and weave them as whole cloth into the fabric of contemporary diasporan African life. The development of African American culture is particularly illustrative of African genius in synthesizing old wisdom and new ways of infusing foreign forms with African substance. It is why Sudarkasa (2007) observes that while there are few direct transfers of Africanisms during the early formation of the new culture, there were innumerable transformations. In the venerable tradition of their elders, African American psychologist/scholars become remarkably sensitive informants of that genius. They understood that we must examine the ancient record for models and metaphors that correctly identify, interpret and situate the symbols so crucial to African perspicacity. But we must also respect the traditions and triumphs, the wisdom and worldview that arose from the unique experience of African people in the United States. Understood in the proper light, then, these scholars provide a meta-theoretical trail leading from the ancient through the contemporary back to the source. Such attempts locate theoretical, applied and methodological insights in African cultural ways (Ajamu, 2004).

## Understanding the History of African American Psychological Discourse

What does the history of African American psychology tell us about defining the discipline (White, 1972)? To outline the domain of African-centered psychology, we need to be informed by the epistemological issues underlying the history of the discipline; otherwise, we commit *transubstantive errors* (Nobles, 1986). Epistemology emphasizes the foundations of human knowledge – how one comes to know (Obasi & Smith, 2009). Transubstantive errors are the result of hegemonic predilection to use the principles of the dominant culture inappropriately to explain the behavior of other cultures both to others and to themselves in ways that are *inauthentic*; thus, one way of organizing the history of African American psychological discourse is to examine it from the perspective of epistemological fidelity.

The history of African American discourse in psychology falls into three overlapping movements (Karenga, 1993; Kambon, 1998; Jones 2004; cf. Diop, 1989): 1) the Traditionalist School; 2) the Reformist School; and, 3) the Radicalist School. We need, however, to re-analyze these movements in order to place them in a perspective that better reflects their influences on current conceptualizations. There are three points of analysis that serve to locate the historical significance of these movements on current discourse. First, we have relabeled the traditional school as the *resistance school* to better capture the thrust of this movement; next, we consider the focus of intervention – the *aim or intent* of the thinkers aligned with this thrust; and lastly, we examine the *focus* of scientific inquiry – the collective outcomes proposed. In this way we can discern epistemological fidelity.

Our re-conceptualization is similar to Banks' (1982) typology that sought to frame African American psychological discourse from the perspective of critical method (Nobles, 1986) – *deconstructionists*, *re-constructionists* and *constructionists*. The deconstructionists attempt to expose the theoretical and conceptual errors in western/Eurocentric psychology; the re-constructionists seek to correct errors by developing more sensitive and relevant models; and the constructionists seek to fashion new ground on which to stand to promote the welfare of African people and the advancement of knowledge and science.

The key feature of Banks' conceptualization is that it sought to identify a coherent struggle or criticism to the very diverse and complex approaches to exploring the realities of African/Black life; although the methods varied, the aims consistently sought to humanize persons of African descent. The importance of this re-analysis cannot be underestimated, because, in addition to its value in situating current theorizing, it is also consistent with, indeed informed by, one of the most central assumptions of an African worldview - *consubstantiation*, which is among other things the premise of inclusivity, rather than exclusivity. African sensibilities demand therefore that we view these historical moments as a coherent, consistent thrust to return agency to African human behavior.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, an ongoing challenge to the hegemony of western psychology has occurred in the three thrusts represented by Karenga and Banks' typologies: 1) the first thrust (*Negro Psychology*) challenges how we applied what we knew from traditional psychology to African Americans in an attempt to more accurately explain our behavior, the challenge is more unconscious and focuses on theoretical application; 2) the second thrust (*Black Psychology*) challenges the existing theoretical domains of traditional psychology based on a deepening inquiry into and understanding of African American experience, the challenge is conscious and focuses on theoretical construction; and 3) the third thrust (*Emerging African Psychology*) challenges the philosophical assumptions upon which all theory relating to the lived experiences of persons of African descent is based, the challenge is self-conscious and focuses on theoretical principles, premises and postulates.

The three thrusts differ, not in their intent to challenge western psychological hegemony, but in the level of the challenge. The level of the challenge involves the extent to which the scholar/researcher is aware of the central problem – transubstantiation – a meta-theoretical, as opposed to theoretical, issue.

By *unconscious*, we mean that although psychologists may have been raised in a sociocultural context that is grounded in African cultural principles, the meaning of those principles may have been forgotten – such that although there is recognition that Black folks are different from the Eurocentric center, those differences are attributed to any of a number of sources, though rarely African retentions. By *conscious*, we mean those psychologists whose grasp on things African is more clear, but often weighed down by the press of Euro-American notions of what is right, proper and normal. By *self-conscious*, we mean the intentional “re-centering of people psychologically”. Centering creates a sense of place, an Afrocentric location that elevates agency – how Africans act upon the world – to a central place in their analyses.

A brief summary of some of the key contributions of members of this third challenge follows. Asante (2003) argued that there exists a set of principles, premises and assumptions that define all African cultures; and that Afrocentricity “locates” African discourse in African principles, in the African *cultural center*. Karenga (1993, p. 35), working in tandem with Asante, argued that Afrocentricity is a “quality of thought and practice” that places African ideals, images and interests at the center of any analysis of African people. Thus, from the position of literature and rhetoric, philosophy and politics, these two giants frame the subsequent levels of discourse, each pressing for the return of African scholarship through the re-ascension and reclamation of ancient and contemporary African models and memes.

Working concurrently were a number of African descent psychologists, making similar arguments and mining the ideas of both Asante and Karenga. Akbar (1991) argued that Afrocentricity involves the identification of the continuous ancient voice in its call to our realization of an authentic African people. This argument was picked up and extended by Hilliard (1997) who suggested that to reawaken the African mind, we must ensure that the goal of our educational and socialization processes is to understand and live up to the principle of Ma'at. Hilliard's ideas were reached from immersion into the study of ancient Kemetic principles and practices. The last of this trio was Nobles (1985), who begin to advance the idea that that which we call culture can be understood as two features that are inextricably interwoven: 1) cultural manifestations (the behaviors of a culture); and 2) cultural substance (the principles that govern the behaviors of a culture). This interrelationship between these two features of culture gives it its dynamic character. Cultural *hegemony* (control of the domain of discourse) is based on *transubstantiation* (the use of one cultural center to define, explain and the behavior of another culture); thus, African-centeredness refers to the cultural center (substance) of African cultures. This advancement was critical because Nobles carries the challenge to the *structural components* of meta-theoretical discourse – the highest discourse, and therefore the most compelling challenge.

Finally, this review would be incomplete without incorporating the cogent, galvanizing propositions put forth by Marimba Ani (1994). Ani proposed that, just as all living things possess DNA, the structure that details the nature and limits of the being it generates, so cultures have a “DNA” which she called “asili” (“germ” or “seed” in Kiswahili). The *asili* conjures the culture in that it sets up the guidelines for the culture's development and outlines the perimeters and parameters of that culture's imperatives. She persuasively argued that culture can be divided into *utamaroho* and *utamawazo*, referring to the structural dimensions which codify the culture's rules, and which characterize the culture's representations. It was also Ani who resurrected Griaule and Dieterlen's (1986) work with the Dogon, who provide a powerful model for the development of the *utamaroho*, the epistemological root of a culture's memes. Given the centrality of cultural philosophy to the genesis and creation of psychology, Ani's analysis of the structural underpinnings of culture and her scathing critique of western cultural hegemony, framed in terms that also provide categories for the formation and articulation of cultural essence, provided African-centered psychologists with the precise philosophical tools for their ultimate challenge – the creation of a theory of personhood consistent with African cultural imperatives.

To summarize our understanding of the history of African American psychological discourse, we view these historical moments as a single unbroken focus, rather than as three disparate movements. Each school furthers the domain of the challenge to western thought, beginning with the challenges to practice, through the challenge to policy, and culminating in the challenge to originating principles and perspectives.

We come now to a crucial point in our analysis. First we argue that African centered theory mandates a new theory of psychology. Next African centered metatheory mandates a new theory of education. Finally African centered theory of psychology mandates a new theory of personhood – Sakhu-Sheti (Nobles, 2006). Thus, African-centered meta-theory mandates a new theory of African personhood. We speak of *personhood* instead of personality to suggest the fullness of one's human expression that evolves over the arc of one's life. Thus, in an African worldview, "personality" theory is really the study of the development (journey) of the human person – better called personhood theory. We accept Nobles refinement that *authenticity* best captures the intent of developing a theory that is centered in African realities.

## **An African-Centered Curriculum**

A major purpose of this paper is to design an African-centered pedagogic approach for teaching African-centered psychology to students, professionals and practitioners, which focuses on both the content and context of teaching. However, since, from an African-centered worldview, knowledge acquisition is also identity construction, the purpose of this curriculum is also to define the essential identity of an African-centered healer. African-centered learning inheres human authenticity, since the central African epistemological axiom is that one knows through experience (Nobles, 1985). Therefore, to effectively situate an appropriate learning arc for those whom we would teach, we must be informed by both an understanding of the development of spirit *and* an understanding of the process of learning. The curriculum outlines a pedagogical approach consistent with African-centered knowledge and identity aims; guided by epistemic frameworks that are consistent with African sensibilities. The theoretical framework guiding our thinking is termed the *Path of the Spirit*.

## **The Path of the Spirit**

In *Seeking the Sakhu*, Nobles (2006) poses the concept of a person as a knowing and knowable spirit. A person is defined in terms of domains of knowledge. He further outlines the cycles of human development (the progress of personal advancement) as a continual cycle of belonging, being and becoming. So, the developmental processes of knowledge acquisition – as designated by the "knowing and knowable spirit" - must by definition be associated with the cycles of personhood – "belonging, being and becoming". Clearly in this model "knowing" is the epistemic character of "being," while "knowable" is associated with "becoming". We posit that the epistemic analogue of "belonging" is a "known" spirit.

The central characteristic of what a person does and the central problematic of African identity in the West is the same - the distinction between who we think we are and who we really are. We need a way of conceptualizing identity that is consonant with the cosmic reality in which identities were framed. No one can call a person into existence that did not bring that person into existence. If others who did not generate the person, names that person, that person will not be named in a way that sets her/him free; others name us to imprison us in the power and the construct of the symbol – meme – the name. Our job now therefore is to call ourselves into existence psychologically.

## **The Meaning of Personhood**

In an African worldview, a person is a known, knowing and knowable spirit. Therefore personhood theory is the study of the journey (development) of the known, knowing and knowable human spirit. Since personhood is defined in terms of knowing, learning theory for African people must be the study of the development and processes of the knowing that defines spirit journey. African sensibility does not require the arbitrary separation of the spirit and the mind; it in fact demands that the various aspects of being – spirit, mind, heart and body – be seen as a single integrated whole in vital connection with all else that is also spirit. This is the central African principle – consubstantiation. Therefore pedagogical theory is also the study of the development (journey) of the known, knowing and knowable human spirit.

The Bantu existential paradigms can greatly assist our efforts. The Bantu argue that the human spirit is a trifold, unfolding radiating spirit; which can be understood as referring to the before-life, the earth-life and the after-life (Fu-Kiau, 1993, 2001). But as has been suggested above, earth-life itself is also trifold, unfolding and radiating – in the cycle of belonging, being and becoming. The human spirit thus passes from the before-life, through the cycles of belonging, being and becoming that constitute earth-life, into the after-life. Furthermore, every ancient tradition marks the passage of the spirit into and out of earth-life. Nobles is being intuitively resonant when he added a moment to his work (2006) called “beginnings”. He was marking the first moment of articulation into earth-life. Since every ancient culture also marks the passage from earth-life into after-life (or the beyond-life), we believe that this is also a moment at the other end of the cycle, which we call “beholding”.

We propose therefore that seven moments frame the arc, sweep or path of a human spirit – Before, Beginning, Belonging, Being, Becoming, Beholding, and Beyond; the path is cyclical and four dimensional. The seven moments refer to periods of articulation of human spirit: the path of the Spirit. Before marks the period in which the human spirit is indistinguishable from the Divine or Supreme Spirit. The central characteristic of *before* is all-spirit.

*Before* reflects the idea that Spirit permeates everything that exists; the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected; and the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence. The genesis of African personhood enhances an awareness of one's connectedness to the Universe of Spirit. People come into the world with purpose. In this stage, human spirit prior to its articulation from the Divine, is perfect, boundless, limitless fully potential.

Beginning marks the moment in which the Supreme Spirit articulates as a specific human spirit. The central characteristic of *Beginning* is *rootedness*. One's personal human spirit is framed from and within the Spirit and the spirits of one's communal referents. Articulation bounds the human spirit, simultaneously enhancing and suppressing its relationship to Spirit, the limitless potential. Only certain characteristics immediately potentiate or advance. Others are muted, and rudimentary. Animation enlivens the spirit thus bounded, so that the unique and specific characteristics now live as a human entity. Beginning is the root for understanding the nature of human beingness grounded in collective African cultural principles; and is the foundation to purpose and function that is essential to providing direction to one's development – how a people understand and define their humanness. Linked to an ante-conscious awareness, beginning is grounded in observation and practical experience, details and differentiates the workings of human agency, includes practices and processes, and is passed down from generation to generation, orally or through symbols. There are three movements in this moment: the spiritual birth – the point at which the human spirit articulates from the Divine essence; the physical birth – the point at which the spirit-in-the-body enters the material world; and the social birth – the point at which the person is inducted into the social community. Now we have a human being.

Belonging defines the connection between each person and the family (clan; community) into which s/he is born. The central characteristic of belonging is *connection*. All experience of existence depends upon belonging. Associated with the awareness of being *known*, belonging creates the spiritual/emotional and mental environment in which the spirit articulates and animates. Being known grounds one in a collective experience, out of which meaning occurs. The naming ceremony is a primary example, naming provides meaning and direction to the arc of their lives. Human life becomes livable through connection. Belonging is the context – a bridge – through which the self moves from the ante-conscious to the conscious.

Being and becoming are both cycles of spirit reformation as the spirit passes through the life cycle. The central characteristic of *Being* consciousness is *knowing*. As the person gains a conscious awareness of the known self – the unique and dynamic combination of muted and enhanced potentials expressed over the physical lifetime – being is the context in which the self comes to know, determine or establish the quality of human functioning. Because each individual self articulates as a unique blend of gifts and needs, when one animates, one enters an expression and experience of spirit which must now be perfected in order to return to perfection – originating limitless potential. The dynamic character of being is the catalytic force that moves the self from conscious to self-conscious awareness.

The central characteristic of *Becoming* self-consciousness is becoming *knowable* – meaning conforming to the patterns of life and reality that comprise the moral universe. Self-consciousness is aimed at becoming good, adhering to the principles of Ma’at. Goodness is continuously aligning personal behaviors with the principles of Ma’at in every specific instance of articulation. As behaviors are shifted toward goodness, the potential for righteousness – becoming right – in that domain is enhanced. Self-conscious awareness reflects a fullness of expression balanced by qualities that promote change as well as preserving integrity.

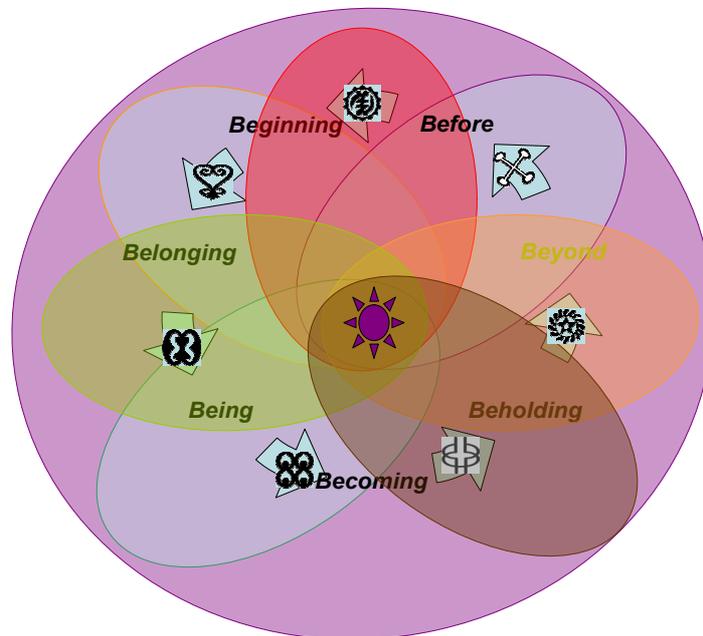
Beholding marks the point at which the human spirit transitions from the body. The central characteristic of *beholding* is *transition*. It marks the point of departure from active human life, when the spirit leaves the body and joins the pantheon of spirits who have once walked the earth. This moment has – like beginning – three movements: the physical death – the point at which the spirit leaves the body; the social death – the point at which the person leaves the living community; the spiritual death – the point at which the person joins the community of the ancestors. This spiritual transition is aided by death rites and rituals.

The central characteristic of *Beyond* or meta-conscious awareness is *cosmic apprehension*. In *Beyond* the spirit re-assumes its ancestral place. It involves movement beyond what is considered material consciousness. It is a rhythm, a pulse in keeping the beat of the universe. It is possible to attain levels of this consciousness even during the human life. Meta-conscious awareness transcends the bounds of material existence while operating within its constraints. It is the capacity to consciously manipulate both the material world and the spiritual world. It is the apprehension of the breath of life. Meta-conscious awareness perceives the infinite in the finite, the potential within expression, and the animate within the non-animated. This thinking suggests the divisions of the human spirit, as well as an articulation of its path.

The table below outlines the development of the human spirit, along with divisions of the human consciousness, a descriptor of the essence of each stage as well as its central characteristic.

	Divisions of Human Consciousness	Development of Human Spirit	Stage Descriptor	Central Characteristic
Before	All-consciousness	All-knowing Spirit	Renewable	The central characteristic of Before is all-spirit
Beginning	Ante-consciousness	Notable Spirit	Renewable	The central characteristic of Beginning is rootedness
Belonging	Trans-consciousness	Known Spirit	Realizable	The central characteristic of Becoming is connection
Being	Consciousness	Knowing Spirit	Responsive	The central characteristic of Being is being knowing.
Becoming	Self-consciousness	Knowable Spirit	Responsible	The central characteristic of Becoming is becoming knowable.
Beholding	Past-Consciousness	Renown Spirit	Recognized	The central characteristic of Beholding is transition.
Beyond	Meta-consciousness	Knowing-all Spirit	Remembered	The central characteristic of Beyond is cosmic apprehension.

This table format, while useful for identifying the elements of the theoretical framework, does not express the dimensionality of spirit, its movement through time and through space. African theoretical models do not tend toward linearity, as do Eurocentric models. The following schematic lies closer to our intent:



Furthermore, because identity formation or human authenticity correlates with the process of learning, this system of moments also forms the framework of growth – as a cycle of illumination. What we have done is to simultaneously frame a model for conceptualizing the advancement and development of African persons *and* the process of teaching one to become an African-Centered psychological healer. We have intentionally utilized a circular model to suggest that the circle can never be unbroken – but it is not simply a circle; it is a sphere that is moving and contains the movement of seven different orbitals.

Thus, the overall intent of ACP is to elevate the person's sense of the meaning of human beingness; the efforts of therapeutic contact are designed to convey connection to a deep wellspring of humanity. Given that the Maafa has been structured to deny the fundamental humanity of persons of African descent, healing or therapeutic contact must seek to reinforce the person's humanity (Richards, 1989).

## **The African Episteme**

The study of the Sakhu encompasses focused instruction in the Path of the Spirit through the Seven Cycles of Illumination across four levels of learning and knowing (see Ani [1994]; Griaule and Dieterlen [1986] for fuller discussion of Dogon levels of learning and knowing). The spiritual origins, history, culture, development, ethics and methodology and spiritness categories are reminiscent of, and indeed drawn from the six acknowledged foci of Africana Studies (excluding psychology) (Karenga, 1993). Each level of the program deepens the discourse through the descriptive, to the comparative, to the analytic into the process of synthesis. We have deliberately included the work of all those African American psychologists who have contributed to our understanding of the field. Because we accept, as given, the fact that ACP is multi-disciplinary, we have also incorporated elements from theorists in other disciplines as they influence the work and the movement of psychological discourse. The focus of the discipline thus far has been in the study of earth-life; it is for this reason that we collapse the before-life and after-life dimensions into the study of the All-Spirit and reflection of the cosmos. The resulting paradigm for teaching African-centered psychology is represented in Diagram 2.

## **Conclusion – “That which is Good is never finished”**

African-centered psychology as an emergent field is part of the on-going project of reclaiming African scholarship reflective of African people. Every psychologist who intends to work with African-descended populations should be trained in ACP as part of the Asante “double column of knowledge”. It will only be through the creation and propagation of scholars and practitioners trained in both domains of psychological discourse that African-descended people will begin to reconstruct their authentic self, both as individuals and as communities.

We contend along with others that until this vital work is seriously undertaken, our communities will continue to suffer the debilitating effects of the Maafa. The role of psychologists as healers must be evidenced in our ability to lead African-descended people to “see the invisible, speak the unspeakable and touch the untouchable”. The return to African-centered thinking, like the return of African people to their traditional greatness, will not be easy; as Cabral, reminds us: “Tell no lies and claim no easy victories”. But until we have fully engaged our collective capacity to define and defend ourselves and our way of life, Fanon, assures us, we are “singing and dancing to please an indifferent world”.

We dedicate this work, as an offering to our ancestors and our children yet unborn, in the name of our brother who lives forever in his goodness – Asa Hilliard (1997) – who reminded us that there is really only one true quest: to be African or not to be! Ase!!

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A meme is an orienting idea which acts like a self-replicating nexus for a cluster of similar and related ideas; it is a unit of cultural discourse which is conceived, embodied and manipulated by the cultural agents who carry it. It acts like an epistemological germ, in that its contagion lies in its rootedness in other similar memes. The more consistent a particular meme is within a cultural discourse, the higher will be its capacity to be transmitted from one person to another and from one generation to another (See Lynch, 1998; Dawkins, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that cultural knowledge cannot contradict; it means only that the culture must designate the meaning and nature of the contradictions, or even define the nature of contradiction.

<sup>3</sup> This approach offers a powerful resolution to the twenty-year-old debate over “Black” vs. “African” psychology, an intellectual confusion reminiscent of the “Blacker than thou” debates of the 1960s. Asante has argued that to be Afrocentric is to be “as African as one can be” (personal communication). The question is not whether the research agenda originates on the Continent or in the Diaspora; it rests entirely on the aim of the researcher, and which of the three general thrusts he or she is attempting to address on behalf of African-descended people.

**Diagram 2: The African Episteme**

<i>EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSTRAINT</i>	<i>BEFORE</i>	<i>BEGINNING</i>	<i>BELONGING</i>	<i>BEING</i>	<i>BECOMING</i>	<i>BEHOLDING</i>	<i>BEYOND</i>
<b>Epistemological Character</b>	<b>African Spiritual Origins</b>	<b>Historical Moments &amp; Movements</b>	<b>African Cultural Origins</b>	<b>Human Development &amp; Pedagogy</b>	<b>Ethics &amp; Methodology</b>	<b>African Cultural Imperative</b>	<b>Spirit, Spirituality &amp; Spiritness</b>
<b>Giri-So</b> The Fore Word - Descriptive Knowledge (Thesis)	Examines primordial African systems of culture, collective and consciousness focused on the development of the ancestral ideas of what is right, normal and good.	Examines cultural and historical foundations of early/colonized African peoples focused on the retention of traditional African understandings in the crucible of the Maafa.	Examines Africanisms inherent in African source materials that survived the Maafa and the subsequent transformations made by early Diasporan Africans/Blacks	Examines traditional and contemporary markers and processes of person functioning and development based on African/Black cultural norms	Examines sources of knowledge of African/Black ethical systems, emphasizing strategies for understanding what is good, normal and right.	Examines the boundaries that allow African cultural processes their dynamic character, while protecting African essence – “to be African or not to be”.	Examines foundational role of spirituality in the communal and ancestral ethos of African/Black people. Examination of spiritual systems and their adaptations in the non-African world.
<b>Benne-So</b> The Side Word - Comparative Knowledge (Antithesis)	Comparing regional similarities and differences regarding construction of the self, community, ancestors and cosmos.	Comparing colonized West, East, Central and Southern African histories that serve as grounding for understanding African/Black existence in continental Africa.	Comparing overarching cultural belief systems and social thought emergent in various historical periods of African/Black peoples; comparing African traditional healing systems.	Comparing developmental paths from pre-birth to post-death across gender roles, community and family issues; addressing the disordering of African human beingness as a result of the Maafa.	Comparing systems of teaching, learning and assessment that emerge out of epistemic positions and questions consistent with African/Black frames of human functioning and respondent to the Maafa.	Comparing the border principles – those elements of the specific cultural variant that are built upon the meta-culture – of both contemporary and ancient African cultures.	Comparing relationship between spirit and psychology; the multidimensional alignment of the person with spiritual, ancestral, familial, communal, cultural and personal destiny.
<b>Bolo-So</b> The Back Word – Analytic Knowledge (Synthesis)	Analysis of cultural transformations along early imperial trajectories, from classical KMT, linking KMT to Sub-Saharan African cultures; focused particularly on trade routes as cultural blending points.	Analysis of historical intersections and alliances of early colonized African people	Analysis of African cultural beliefs and transformed cultural features – content of religious icons, symbolic images, aesthetics, rhetoric – as well as the role of language as a critical medium for structuring thought. <b>worldview</b>	Analysis of how one comes to know, determine or establish the quality of human functioning resonant with African/Black assumptions.	Analysis of ethical systems that have African origins – use of proverbs, etc. – to teach and assess roles, rules and responsibilities for human behavior.	Analysis of fusions and diffusions that both buoy and threaten the border principles in both Diasporan and continental African cultures - <b>ideology</b>	Analysis of traditional and contemporary African spiritually-based healing strategies regarding how African/Blacks intervene when disruptions occur in living.
<b>So-Dayi</b> The Clear Word - Truth (Genesis) Epistemic Contributions & Applications	Realization/construction of the African Asili and <b>cosmology</b> from its various source points.	Rescue of historical continuity of Africans throughout Diaspora, providing conceptual - link to contemporary African/Black functioning and <b>ontology</b> .	Retrieval of African centered <b>epistemology</b> (cultural aspects) focused on the development of African/Black conceptions of human beingness.	Recovery of African centered <b>authenticity</b> (cultural factors I) focused on the development of African/Black psychological inquiry and theoretical trajectory	Restoration of African centered <b>axiology</b> (cultural factors II) and knowledge validation systems focused on Kemetic ethical system of Ma’at and its role in promoting authenticity to human behavior.	Remembering of African-centered <b>ethos</b> through the reclamation of African-centered <b>eschatology</b>	Renewal of African-centered systems grounded in Spirit and concerned with the origins, nature, ways, limits and the features of human functioning; emphasizes the re-spiritualization of human agency and <b>dimensionality</b>