

# A CALL FOR AFRICAN CENTERED PSYCHOLOGY



*“African centeredness... represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of analyses”*

*- Wade Nobles, 1998*

Within our current social climate, the need for a psychology that focuses on the specific needs of Black people is a necessity. The events of this year have been a constant attack on the Black psyche.

From the public murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Elijah McClain (and so on) to the recent massacre of peaceful protesters in Nigeria, Black people have seen themselves murdered, suffering and brutalised across mass media all year. We are suffering from a collective trauma. A trauma that already existed prior to 2020. A trauma caused by systemic and institutionalised racism. A trauma that traditional eurocentric counselling psychology is not equipped to heal.

Traditional counselling psychology is failing minorities. Throughout history, middleclass heterosexual white men have served as our standard for scientific study. Having used such a limited range of people, how can the theories developed be expected to apply en masse? The everyday experiences of a 30-year-old middle class white male will differ substantially from a working class Black woman in her 50s. As traditional eurocentric counselling psychology does not consider cultural differences, the two would be observed using the same framework. When white culture serves as the foundation for Counselling Theory, other culture groups are left with a practice that lacks the knowledge and understanding required to effectively help. Eurocentric psychology's disregard for the "other" has allowed Western psychology to become a tool of cultural oppression. Understanding that the eurocentric assumptions and observations made by

counseling professionals will be shaped by the society in which they live, is the first step in recognising Western Psychology's shortcomings.

African-centered psychology is qualitative and contextual whereas westernised mainstream psychology is quantitative, empirical and culturally limited. African-centered psychology recognises the role that culture plays in our perceptions, values and everyday behaviour. Black people born and raised in the UK for example, will still retain a strong element of their ethnic culture mixed in with the Western culture in which they have been raised. This approach proposes treatment that acknowledges and understands this. Social and cultural context is an important feature of the African-centered approach as one of its basic principles is that nothing exists in isolation. This allows therapists to include cultural factors in their treatment of patients by understanding the importance of language, cultural values and experiences etc. and their effect on how we see things.

The African-centered approach to psychology requires a complete reframing of worldview and understanding of the self. The approach aims to re-center Black people in social, political and cultural discourse. An important aspect of this approach is the notion of personhood vs individuality. People are not seen as distinct separate beings, but as the personification of their familial characteristics. Healing and treatment is therefore directed at

multiple causes, taking generational and ancestral trauma into account.

Culturally relevant treatment is needed that will address all these issues, providing a holistic approach to mental health and well-being and remedying the shortfalls of westernised psychology.

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