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Author(s): Sheila R. Black, Susie A. Spence and Safiya R. Omari

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CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS TO THE FIELD OF PSYCHOLOGY

SHEILA R. BLACK

University of Alabama

SUSIE A. SPENCE

SAFIYA R. OMARI

Jackson State University

This article highlights the contributions of African Americans to the field of psychology with a focus on the struggles of early African American psychologists, the rise of Afrocentrism, and recent theoretical models developed by African American psychologists. The conclusion of this work is that psychology is much richer because of the contributions of African American psychologists.

Keywords: *history of psychology; Black psychology*

Many African Americans credit W.E.B. DuBois with being the first African American psychologist because he wrote so eloquently about psychological struggles of African Americans in his classic work entitled, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In particular, DuBois (1903) focused on African Americans coming to grips with a phenomenon labeled *double consciousness*—seeing one's self from the perspective of the dominant culture and from the perspective of the African American community. He spoke of a duality between two perspectives, with one perspective embracing African American culture and the other perspective viewing African American culture with contempt. Further, DuBois spoke of African Americans constantly being judged by another culture's measuring stick—and coming out on the short end.

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A careful study of African Americans within the field of psychology will reveal that there has been an ongoing struggle among African American psychologists to have African American people evaluated by culturally appropriate standards rather than by standards of the dominant culture. An ongoing theme among African American psychologists has been that African American culture is different from the majority culture, but “different” does not mean inferior. The purpose of this work is to explore the history of African Americans in the field of psychology and to highlight the contributions that African Americans have made to the field.

One might argue that there were three periods with respect to African Americans in the field of psychology. In the initial phase, African Americans focused on survival; later, many African Americans developed a more Afrocentric orientation; and finally, African Americans used a combination of traditional methods and Afrocentric principles to better understand people of African descent in an American society.

In 1920, Cecil Sumner (Sawyer, 2000) received his Ph.D. and became the first African American to be awarded a doctoral degree in psychology from an American university. Although Sumner is an important figure in psychology and in African American history, he is rarely mentioned in introductory psychology textbooks.

When one considers the context in which Sumner earned his Ph.D., one realizes that he earned his degree against incredible odds. Sumner was born in 1895—one year before the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* court decision upholding the policy of “separate but equal” (Guthrie, 1998). In 1920, the year in which he earned his Ph.D., slavery had only been abolished for slightly more than 50 years. Only 11 Blacks had earned Ph.D.s between the years of 1876 and 1920, compared with 10,000 Caucasians (Guthrie, 1998).

Cecil Sumner was able to earn his Ph.D. in psychology against almost impossible odds because of his superior academic abilities (Guthrie, 1998; Sawyer, 2000). Sumner received his elementary education through several school systems in Virginia, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. At the high school level, his parents decided to home school him, as they were not satisfied with the type of education offered in segregated school systems. He apparently

received a superior education through home schooling, because he excelled in his university coursework, graduating from Lincoln University as valedictorian of his class (Sawyer, 2000).

At about the time that Sumner received his undergraduate degree, he began corresponding with James P. Porter, the dean and professor of psychology at Clark University, who encouraged him to apply to the university. The president of Clark University was Stanly Hall (Guthrie, 1998), a renowned child psychologist. Hall had views about diversity that were quite liberal at the time. He taught pedagogy at Howard University and encouraged students at Howard and other historically Black universities to apply to Clark.

Sumner was accepted at Clark during the spring of 1915. His desire to pursue psychology was in part nurtured by his interactions with Hall. Although Sumner initially embarked on the study of psychology so that he could serve the African American community (Sawyer, 2000), he learned early in his career that there would be consequences for being too outspoken or critical of the status quo (Sawyer, 2000). During his early years as a graduate student, Sumner wrote a letter in 1918 to the editor of the *Worcester Gazette* that was critical of the government and its treatment of African Americans (Sawyer, 2000). In one letter, Sumner explained America's hatred of Germany via Freud's defense mechanisms of repression and projection. Basically, he argued that Americans became angry at Germany's treatment of various groups because it reminded them of their treatment of Blacks. The response from the Worcester community and from university administrators was swift and harsh. Both the Worcester community and university officials demanded that Sumner be dismissed from Clark University. Hall urged that Sumner be allowed to continue his education. Hall assured the Worcester community and the university that Sumner would be taught a lesson (Sawyer, 2000).

A few days later, Sumner wrote a letter apologizing for his earlier statements. Sumner's subsequent writings appeared to be in line with the prevailing views of the dominant culture. His primary lesson appeared to be that he could not contradict the prevailing view of the dominant culture and survive.

Upon completion of his Ph.D., Sumner initially accepted a position as chair of the philosophy and psychology departments at West Virginia Collegiate Institute (WVCI). During his tenure at WVCI (1926 and 1927), he published two controversial articles that alienated him from much of the African American academic community because the articles espoused the belief that African Americans were intellectually inferior and that segregation should be allowed to continue.

Sawyer (2000) proposed an interesting theory as to why Sumner espoused views in 1926 and 1927 that appeared diametrically opposite of the views that he had espoused in 1918, less than a decade earlier. Sawyer argued that it was doubtful that Sumner actually changed his opinion about the intellectual capabilities of African Americans or about segregation and discriminatory practices. For one thing, Sumner was a very demanding teacher at a predominantly African American college. Sawyer reasoned that Sumner would not have been as demanding if he really considered African American students to be intellectually inferior. Rather, Sawyer (2000) argued that Sumner had a hidden agenda that involved funding for historically Black colleges. He decided to outwardly espouse the position that the dominant culture wanted to hear, in hopes that they would provide resources for historically Black colleges. As Sawyer noted, many African Americans outwardly espoused the dominant culture's viewpoint to acquire resources during that period. Although Sumner was not able to outwardly refute theoretical perspectives that cast African Americans in a negative light, his contributions to psychology should not be underestimated.

Sumner laid the groundwork for African American psychologists (Guthrie, 1998). He established the first psychology department at Howard University, a historically Black university. Howard University has provided undergraduate and graduate training in psychology for more African Americans than any other university. Sumner is also credited with training a new generation of African American psychologists. However, it would be for future African American psychologists to challenge psychology to change its perception of African Americans.

Shortly after Sumner received his Ph.D., a number of other African Americans followed suit and contributed to the scholarly work in psychology. Much of the research focused on intelligence testing and the education of African Americans. For example, Herman Canady (1936) published an article that focused on rapport building in testing situations. Martin Jenkins published more than 80 books, monographs, and articles. In particular, he is noted for his work that indicated that there was no difference in intelligence across race (Jenkins, 1948, 1950; Jenkins & Randall, 1948). Carlton Goodlett, who received his Ph.D. in 1938, sponsored a 3- to 5-year study conducted by four Black organizations (i.e., the National Newspaper Publishers Association, National Bar Association, National Business League, and National Medical Association) that examined the effect of alcohol, drugs, and narcotics on African Americans (Guthrie, 1998).

In the burgeoning field of psychology, African Americans were making a number of contributions. However, the psychologist perhaps best known for changing the social fabric of society, with regard to civil rights, is Kenneth Clark through the 1954 court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002; Singleton, 1975; Tucker, 1994) in Topeka, Kansas.

The case of *Brown v. Board of Education* addressed the separate but equal doctrine that was in effect as a result of the ruling in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* case was filed because a shoemaker, who was one eighth Black, was jailed for sitting in the White section of the East Louisiana Railroad. Plessy, the shoemaker, filed a lawsuit in 1892 arguing that the separate but equal doctrine was unconstitutional because it violated the 13th and 14th amendments. However, Ferguson, the judge, ruled that it was constitutional for there to be separate facilities for Whites and African Americans as long as the facilities were equal (Rodgers & Bullock, 1974). This ruling remained unchallenged until 56 years later when Oliver Brown filed a lawsuit on behalf of Linda Brown, his daughter. He protested the fact that his daughter had to bypass a White school to attend a Black school. He took his case to the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). One of the major obstacles that the NAACP faced in winning the case was proving that segregation resulted in inequality. Clark's work involving skin color and self-esteem was crucial in assisting the NAACP's court case (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002).

In Clark's study, Black elementary school children were presented with pictures of dolls. During an interview, two dolls were presented to the children. One of the dolls was White and the other was Black. The children were asked a series of questions about the dolls. For example, they were instructed to "point to the doll that was bad"; most of the Black children pointed to the Black doll. The interviewer also asked the children about doll preference; the majority of the children preferred the White doll to the Black doll. Despite all of the negative traits attributed to the Black doll, the Black children reported that the Black doll best reflected them. Clark argued from these studies that segregation had a profound effect on Black children's self-esteem. That is, Black students felt that the reason that they were separated from White children was because of some type of inherent inferiority (Rodgers & Bullock, 1974).

Thurgood Marshall, then a lawyer on behalf of the NAACP, argued that segregation resulted in inequality because of the stigma that it places on the minority group (Rodgers & Bullock, 1974; Russo, Harris, & Sandige, 1994). Group members in essence concluded that segregation exists because of their inherent inferiority. The NAACP successfully overturned the policy of separate but equal through the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, and a court order was issued to end segregation in education. The NAACP's victory was largely due to Clark's work.

Clark's contribution to psychology and to the nation cannot be underestimated. For the first and only time, psychological research was used to change the interpretation of the constitution. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was the starting point in ending legal segregation in America (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002; Guthrie, 1998; Holiday & Holmes, 2003).

It should be noted that a number of psychologists congratulated Clark on his victory and pointed out that it exemplified how psychological work could be used to advance the public interest. For example, Gordon Allport (1954), who had conducted important work on prejudice in America, expressed delight over the court decision. Likewise, Clark's current and former colleagues expressed enthusiasm over the victory (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002).

Although Clark accomplished a remarkable feat and received praise from colleagues and former mentors, Benjamin and Crouse (2002) reported that the most prestigious national psychological organization, the American Psychological Association (APA), was strangely silent about Clark's accomplishments. As Benjamin and Crouse point out, the APA was probably silent because of the diverse political attitudes represented by its members. Although according to a survey conducted by Deutscher and Chein (1948), close to 90% of psychologists and other social scientists believed segregation to be harmful, not all psychologists were in favor of desegregation (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002). For example, Henry Garrett argued on the side of the segregationists during the *Brown v. Board of Education* court proceedings (Wober, 1971), and he openly criticized Clark and his colleagues for using psychology to bring about social reform (Benjamin & Crouse, 2002). There were several psychologists (i.e., Henry Garrett, Frank McGurk, and Audrey Shuey) who vociferously proclaimed that African Americans were intellectually inferior and would probably be unable to take advantage of newfound educational opportunities that desegregation would bring (Wober, 1971).

In fact, after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, segregationists appealed to academicians such as Garrett (Wober, 1971) to support their claims that African Americans were genetically inferior and that educational desegregation would be a disaster.

On what basis did these psychologists claim that African Americans were intellectually inferior? The psychologists who asserted this position used the intelligence test as the basis for their claims. It was well documented that African Americans scored a standard deviation lower than Whites on intelligence tests. The controversy revolved around the explanation for the disparity. Two explana-

tions for the racial disparity in IQ scores were particularly offensive to African American psychologists: cultural deprivation and genetics.

Probably the most outspoken proponent of the view that African Americans scored lower on the IQ test because of genetics was Arthur Jensen (1968, 1969). Arthur Jensen's claims were based in part on research conducted by Cyril Burt (Jensen, 1974; Kamin, 1974; Tucker, 1994; Willmott, 1998). Cyril Burt compared identical twins reared apart with identical twins reared in the same environment to determine the degree to which the environment influenced intelligence test scores. He argued that if IQ scores were heavily influenced by the environment, then IQ scores should be more similar for identical twins reared in the same environment than for identical twins reared in different environments. Burt found that identical twins (i.e., twins with the same genetic makeup) who were reared apart were just as similar, in terms of IQ scores, as twins reared in the same environment (Jensen, 1974). Based on these studies, he concluded that the environment contributed very little to intelligence—only about 15% to 20% of intelligence. Thus, he concluded that environmental differences could not account for the disparity in IQs between Blacks and Whites. Jensen also claimed that racial differences were not reduced when “culturally fair tests” were used and that racial differences were greater on measures highly correlated with abstract thinking and higher order reasoning skills (i.e., tasks related to *g* or generalized intelligence) than on tasks that required rote memorization.

It should be noted that Jensen's views in no way represented the views of all psychologists. Numerous psychologists criticized Jensen's work. Kamin (1974), for example, pointed out that Jensen relied heavily on data collected by Cyril Burt and that Burt's data were suspect. That is, statisticians have pointed out that the pattern of data reported by Burt is statistically very unlikely. Moreover, psychologists indicated that environmental differences experienced by identical twins reared apart were minuscule compared with environmental differences experienced by Blacks and Whites. Thus, Kamin and others argued that it was inappropriate for Burt to apply his study involving identical twins to racial differences in IQ.

Psychologists have also criticized Jensen's claims that racial differences remained when IQ tests were culturally fair. A test is generally considered culturally fair if it does not rely on preexisting semantic knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, historical facts, etc.). However, researchers have pointed out that even nonverbal tests can be culturally biased (Perez-Arce, 1999). For example, a test can be culturally biased if members of minority groups are less familiar with the stimuli or the type of cognitive processing required by the test than members of the majority group. Thus, the genetic explanation of racial differences in IQ was assailed because one could not conclude that group differences were due to genetics when two groups come from widely different cultures and backgrounds (Helms, 1992; Persell, 1981; Williams, 1973).

Another explanation for the racial disparity in IQ scores was that African Americans were in some way culturally deprived. Although Caucasian psychologists who supported the cultural deprivation explanation believed that their explanations were kinder to African Americans than those who attributed racial differences to genetics, many African Americans found the term "cultural deprivation" demeaning. It implied that African Americans either lacked a culture or possessed an inferior culture (Persell, 1981).

African American psychologists were disturbed that both the cultural deprivation and the genetic inferiority views assumed that the IQ test accurately measured African Americans' intelligence. They were even more disturbed that access to opportunity often depended on a test score. Based on test performance, children were tracked in educational settings and received either a challenging curriculum or one designed for the mentally retarded. College admissions were based on test performance. A high test score opened the gates of opportunity and a low score closed them. However, because admission tests were culturally biased, it was unlikely that the bulk of African Americans would have the scores to access academic and employment opportunities. In essence, psychological testing could perpetuate segregation.

By the late 1960s, a number of African American psychologists called for a moratorium on psychological testing. They wanted to

determine the validity of the tests for African Americans before subjecting them to more tests. The APA did not agree (Guthrie, 1998).

This controversy over psychometric testing widened the rift between African American psychologists and the APA. African American psychologists felt that members of the APA minimized the extent to which culture influences test performance.

A number of African American psychologists thought that the field of psychology would be more responsive to the plight of African Americans if a larger proportion of psychologists were African American. Thus, African American psychologists encouraged the APA to make an effort to recruit more African Americans for graduate training in psychology, especially clinical psychology (Williams, 1974).

BLACK PSYCHOLOGISTS ORGANIZE

In the early 1960s, it appeared that African American APA members and the APA organization might resolve their disagreements. For in 1963, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Division 9 of APA) presented a proposal to the APA administration to study the training and employment needs of African Americans (Guthrie, 1998). African Americans were initially enthusiastic about the proposal, but their enthusiasm was short-lived. For 4 years, the proposal was not addressed. By the time the APA addressed the proposal by making recommendations, African American psychologists were smoldering with frustration and were discussing the possibility of separating from the APA (Guthrie, 1998; Holiday & Holmes, 2003).

African Americans had organized and formed a separate Black Psychology Organization earlier. In the 1930s, Canady spearheaded a movement to form a separate organization (Guthrie, 1998). African Americans had many of the same concerns then—namely that African Americans' needs were not being addressed by the organization at large. In the late 1930s, however, Black psychologists did not directly confront the APA about its policies.

During the late 1960s, African Americans vociferously opposed the APA's policies (Guthrie, 1998; Holiday & Holmes, 2003; Williams, 1974). African American psychologists were most incensed over the continuation of psychological testing, the publication of research that cast African Americans in a negative light, and the lack of aggressive efforts to attract more African Americans to professional careers in psychology (Guthrie, 1998; Holiday & Holmes, 2003; Williams, 1974).

In 1968, African American psychologists formed the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi; Guthrie, 1998; Williams, 1974). The organization announced that it was private, completely separate from the APA, and had its own regulations and bylaws.

A year after the formation of the ABPsi, the dispute between African American psychologists and the APA came to a head. In 1969, Black students interrupted George Miller's presidential address. They demanded that steps be taken to increase the proportion of Blacks within psychology and that there be a moratorium on psychological testing. The APA responded by organizing a joint committee made up of a coalition of APA and ABPsi members. However, there was no resolution to the dispute between the student organization of Black psychologists and the APA (Guthrie, 1998; Williams, 1974).

During the years between 1969 and 1971, in part because it appeared that Black psychologists and the APA had irreconcilable differences, members of ABPsi redoubled their efforts in growing the organization (Williams, 1974). Members of ABPsi were excited about advancing a Black psychology—a psychology that focused on theories and research relevant to Black people. Under the leadership of Dr. Reginald Jones, in 1973 the organization established the *Journal of Black Psychology*. The goal of the journal was to focus on psychological phenomena relevant to people of African descent; the journal covered such topics as cognition, social psychology, personality, and so on. It also provided a forum for a philosophical perspective termed *Afrocentrism*—a philosophical perspective that emphasized the importance of people of African descent being African centered (Verharen, 1995).

AFROCENTRISM

Many members of the Association of Black Psychologists argued that the concepts bandied about in mainstream psychology were not appropriate for Black people because the concepts were based on White rather than Black culture. During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of African American psychologists embraced Afrocentrism. In his book entitled *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, Molefi Kete Asante (1980) argued that people of African descent have a very rich and valuable culture and will be better adjusted to the extent that they embrace traditional African culture. He pointed out that people of African descent have traditionally emphasized communalism, spirituality, oral expression, emotionality, the importance of human relationships, and so on. He also argued that these values are at times at variance with European culture.

Asante (1980, 1987; Asante & Asante, 1985) also pointed out that African culture encourages certain cognitive styles and/or ways of processing information. He noted that holistic thinking is emphasized in African culture versus the analytic thinking emphasized in European culture. As a result of the emphasis on holistic thinking, African Americans excel at seeing relationships between seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts. Creativity is also emphasized in African American culture, which might explain why African Americans have contributed so much to American culture through music, language, fashion, and so on. Oratorical style is also emphasized. Although not all African American psychologists aligned themselves with Afrocentrism per se, the Afrocentric perspective had a profound effect on African American psychologists.

AFROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE AND TESTING

Members of ABPsi pointed out that if African Americans have different communication, behavioral, and learning styles from Whites, then African Americans would be at a distinct disadvan-

tage when taking standardized tests normed on White culture (Helms, 1992; Williams, 1973).

Black psychologists pointed out that when people of African descent take the test and answer questions from an African American perspective, they are penalized with respect to their test performance and, thus, appear deficient with respect to the domain assessed by the test (Adebimpe, Gigandet, & Harris, 1979; Dana, 1998; P.A. Hays, 1996; Nikelly, 1992; Solomon, 1992; Whaley, 2001, 2002). For example, mysticism and spirituality are emphasized in African American culture. Many African Americans will report having visions or conversations with deceased individuals. However, on some standardized tests designed to assess pathology, responses indicating a belief in supernatural experiences are considered pathological (Gynther, Fowler, & Erdberg, 1971).

Along the same line, many linguists believe that there is a Black or an African American English that differs from Standard English. African Americans may be at a disadvantage when taking some standardized tests because they may misinterpret the questions (Greenfield, 1997). For example, Williams and Rivers (1972, 1975) found that African Americans' test performance could be improved if certain questions and/or instructions were reworded (Scott & Shaw, 1985; Williamson-Ige, 1984). Rodekohr and Haynes (2001) also found that speakers of African American English scored lower on standard language tests but not on tests designed specifically to assess African American English.

Perhaps the importance of prior experience and culture is best illustrated in Robert L. Williams's work with the Black Intelligence Test. Robert L. Williams and his colleagues found that African Americans who scored below average on a standardized intelligence test frequently scored quite high on the Black Intelligence Test (Boone & Adesso, 1974).

Thus, one of the great challenges for the ABPsi was to provide evidence that culture affects all areas of life—particularly psychometric test performance. In short, a test score cannot be considered alone without taking into consideration an individual's past experience and his or her cultural orientation.

Beyond the findings that culture influences psychometric test performance, is there empirical research to support the Afrocentric model? Do African Americans have a uniquely different culture?

EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR AFROCENTRISM

Most African Americans believe that there are no innate differences among people of different races. However, many Black psychologists would argue that there is a Black subculture with values and rules that are different from the White dominant culture. In the following sections, we address the evidence that people of African descent have a culture separate from the White culture. We address three primary tenets of Afrocentrism: spirituality, communalism, and learning styles.

SPIRITUALITY IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

One of the major tenets of Afrocentrism is that people of African descent emphasize spirituality. "Spirituality refers to an individual's belief in the sacred and transcendent nature of life, and the manifestation of these beliefs in a sense of connectedness with others and in a quest for goodness" (Mattis, 2002). C.G. Ellison (1993) found that African Americans, in particular, valued spirituality and a connection with a deity as evidenced by the fact that they prayed and participated in private devotion more than their White counterparts.

A number of studies have found that spirituality is a strength of African American culture. In fact, several investigators point out that Black women have been able to cope with almost impossible odds through spirituality. For example, Black (1999) found that spirituality and faith in a higher power played an important role in the lives of African American women living in poverty. Their faith bolstered their self-esteem and provided the women with a certain optimism. Other studies have corroborated Black's findings in that they have also shown a positive correlation between spirituality and

self-esteem among African Americans (Conway, 1985-1986; C.G. Ellison, 1993; Gibson, 1986; Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981), possibly because Black theology emphasizes the inherent worth of every human being (C.G. Ellison, 1993). One of the main vehicles used for enhancing spirituality is the Black church. Glenn and Gotard (1977), in a study investigating religiosity from 1957 to 1975, reported that across all socioeconomic levels, Blacks demonstrated higher levels of church attendance and church involvement than their White counterparts (C.G. Ellison & Sherkat, 1995).

COMMUNALISM AND THE BLACK CHURCH

Another of the major tenets of Afrocentrism is that African Americans tend to think in terms of "we" rather than "I." Perhaps the importance of communalism in traditional African culture is demonstrated in the African axiom, "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am" (Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, & Albury, 1997; Mbiti, 1970; Nobles, 1974, 1991). There is a plethora of evidence that communalism continues to be an important aspect of African American culture, especially within the church and the extended Black family. The Black church is one of the few institutions owned by Blacks. Thus, the ministers and church members often feel a responsibility to the African American community at large rather than just the members of the individual church. As a result, the church provides a vehicle for business opportunities, education, spiritual guidance, financial management, and political advancement (C.G. Ellison & Sherkat, 1995; Taylor, Thornton, & Chatters, 1987). The church is also the place where informal support services are provided (Dressler, 1985; Taylor & Chatters, 1986; Taylor, Chatters, & Mays, 1988). It is interesting that church involvement is also more closely linked to life satisfaction for Blacks than for Whites (St. George & McNamara, 1984).

Communalism is also very much emphasized in the traditional Black family. Linda Chatters's work indicates a greater amount of intergenerational and extended family social support among African American families relative to Caucasian families (W.C. Hays & Mindel, 1973; Johnson & Barer, 1990; Taylor et al., 1988; Taylor,

Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990). In fact, survey studies of informal support networks have revealed that two out of three African American individuals report receiving substantial support from family (Johnson & Barer, 1995; Martineau, 1977; McAdoo, 1978; Taylor et al., 1988). Very old African Americans, in particular, receive assistance from both immediate and extended family members. In fact, the results of one study indicated that almost half of the Blacks who were older than 85 and childless felt comfortable soliciting assistance from nephews, nieces, and collateral kin, almost twice the proportion of their White counterparts (Johnson, 1999).

Communalism is also emphasized by African Americans' reliance on the community at large. For example, a number of elderly African Americans have "fictive kin" (Johnson, 1999) in their informal social network. These individuals are not related by blood but are considered to be relatives or part of the family (Johnson, 1999). Thus, a fictive daughter might check on an elderly neighbor in the same way that a biological daughter would, or a fictive mother might provide emotional support, advice, and so on in the same way that a biological mother would. Although Chatters, Taylor, and Jayakody (1994) found that a number of Whites also have fictive kin, their research indicated that the practice is more common among African Americans.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING AN AFRICAN IDENTITY

Another Afrocentric principle stressed by Asante (1980, 1987) is that African Americans will be healthier to the extent that they embrace African culture. Perhaps the best support for the importance of having a Black identity comes from Cross's famous Nigrescence Theory. Cross developed a test in which people are asked about their identification with African culture across a variety of domains. In general, higher racial identity is associated with higher self-esteem (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). There is also evidence that it is important for African Americans to have an African American social support network. One

study showed that African Americans who grew up in the African American community and had an African American social network were psychologically healthier in comparison with African Americans who grew up in Caucasian communities with few African American social ties (Postmes & Branscombe, 2002). Further, research has shown that African Americans with positive racial identities have fewer negative attitudes about other racial and/or ethnic groups (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

COGNITIVE STYLE

There has also been work that validates the Afrocentric notion that African Americans have a different cognitive style from most Caucasians. Asante described the African mode of information processing as holistic and relational. These qualities are best captured by a cognitive style developed by Witkin, Dyk, Fattuson, Goodenough, and Karp (1962; Witkin & Goodenough, 1981), in which he argued that field-dependent learners process information contextually, whereas field-independent learners process information objectively—independent of context. Several studies have provided corroborating evidence that African American children are more field sensitive than their White counterparts (Banks, 1988; Hale, 1993; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Ramirez & Price-Williams, 1974).

Boykin and his colleagues have also found that African American students learn better when the school environment mimics the home environment in terms of level of stimulation (Allen & Boykin, 1991; Boykin, 1977, 1978; Boykin & Allen, 1988; Boykin, Allen, Davis, & Senior, 1997; Boykin & Cunningham, 2001; Dill & Boykin, 2000). They noted that many African American homes offer a great deal of sensory stimulation because of the higher population density in African American homes relative to White homes. Thus, African American children may be especially receptive to stimulating environments and may be more apt to find monotonous environments intolerable.

To test his hypothesis, Boykin (1982) systematically manipulated the amount of variability and sensory stimulation that work-

ing-class Black and middle-class White students experienced when performing a series of tasks. He found that working-class Black children, but not White middle-class children, performed better when the task format contained a great deal of sensory stimulation.

Several studies, focusing on culture and learning, have compared the effectiveness of cooperative or peer-centered classrooms with African American students to classrooms that use the traditional lecture format. These studies tend to show that African American children learn better in school settings in which there is a great deal of peer interactiveness than in classrooms that use the traditional lecture format (Boykin, Jagers, et al., 1997; C.M. Ellison & Boykin, 1994), which would be consistent with the Afrocentric principles of cooperativeness and communalism.

The Afrocentric perspective made two very important contributions to psychology. First, the Afrocentric perspective emphasized skills of African American people. Heretofore, the focus had been on deficits that African Americans possessed based on test norms. Second, the Afrocentric approach emphasized that cultural context was important when evaluating subgroups of people in America. Most people would acknowledge that culture would be important when evaluating people of other countries. However, many psychologists failed to acknowledge the cultural differences between African Americans and Caucasians. Further, they failed to acknowledge the extent to which these cultural differences might affect test performance (Greenfield, 1997).

In addition to providing knowledge about African American culture, African American psychologists have provided models that can be extended beyond the African American community to other marginalized groups. An excellent example of this is Steele's work on stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele argues that many groups in America are associated with negative stereotypes and that members of stereotyped groups have special challenges. First, they have to battle the temptation to internalize the negative stereotype, and second, they often feel the need to prove themselves to the society at large.

Steele has pointed out that members of the stereotyped group can deal with negative stereotypes in one of two ways. They can

either avoid domains that are associated with negative stereotypes or they can redouble their efforts to prove the stereotype wrong.

What happens when a highly motivated person from a stereotyped group attempts to succeed in a domain relevant to the stereotype? Steele (1997) points out that the person will be under tremendous pressure. On one hand, the person is motivated to achieve in a domain for which there is a negative stereotype but knows that society expects failure. Steele referred to this extra pressure as stereotype threat. Steele has pointed out that African Americans are particularly likely to experience stereotype threat when a task assesses intelligence because of the negative stereotype about African Americans and intelligence. Steele has conducted several studies addressing the effect of negative stereotypes on African Americans, particularly in the domain of academic ability.

Steele has argued that even if Whites and African Americans are equated on socioeconomic status and other demographic variables, the test-taking experience is very different between members of the two groups. African Americans would more than likely experience the extra anxiety associated with stereotype threat. Based on extant literature that shows an inverse relationship between anxiety (beyond a certain threshold) and performance, one would predict that this extremely high anxiety would have an adverse effect on African Americans' performance.

To test his hypotheses, Steele conducted a number of studies in which he varied the extent to which African Americans were exposed to stereotype threat. He found that when a racial stereotype was activated and African American students were led to believe that their test performance was diagnostic of future academic success, their performance was depressed, relative to situations in which race was not activated and test performance was not considered diagnostic.

More recently, Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, and Steele (2001) found that stereotype threat not only had an adverse effect on test performance but also had a deleterious effect on blood pressure levels. That is, African Americans in a high threat condition (e.g., a condition in which they were reminded of the stereotype concerning race and intelligence) had significantly higher blood pressure

levels when answering difficult test questions than Whites in the same condition or African Americans in the nonthreatening condition. Thus, the Blascovich et al. (2001) study provides evidence that stereotype threat might contribute to the high incidences of hypertension among African Americans.

Steele's model has been used to elucidate the experiences of many other groups who experience stereotype threat. For example, recent work has investigated the effect of stereotype on women with regard to math (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Walsh, Hickey, & Duffy, 1999) and on the elderly with regard to memory (Nelson, 2002). Thus, Steele's work provides examples of how models developed by African American scholars have been used to shed light on other groups who have had some of the same experiences as African Americans.

CONCLUSION

African Americans have made a number of contributions to psychology. First, they have experiences that have traditionally made them sensitive to issues of fairness, justice, and so on. This would explain the propensity of many African American psychologists such as Kenneth Clark and Robert Williams to pursue psychology in service of the public interest. Along the same line, African American psychologists have been concerned about fairness and justice within psychology. They have insisted on the importance of considering context and culture when evaluating all people and have pointed out the fallacy of developing deficit models when members of minority groups do not conform to the dominant culture. Finally, African American psychologists have emphasized the strengths of African American culture rather than just concentrating on negative information. Further, as Steele's work illustrates, models that have been developed to explain the experiences of African Americans have been extended to explain the experiences of other groups who have been marginalized and thus have some of the same experiences as African Americans in this country. Because of the aforementioned reasons, psychology as a whole is

richer because of the contributions of African American psychologists.

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Sheila R. Black, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Her research interests include cognitive aging and the effects of culture on cognitive processes.

Susie A. Spence, Ph.D., is a professor and director of the Ph.D. program in social work at Jackson State University. Her research, scholarship, teaching, and related interests include gerontology, with particular emphasis on elderly African Americans.

Safiya R. Omari, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Jackson State University. Her research, teaching, and related interests include social identity theory, development of race and gender consciousness, issues of race and gender as they relate to identity, physical health, and psychological well-being, particularly among African Americans and other people of color.