



# Fundamental Task and Challenge of Black Psychology

Journal of Black Psychology

39(3) 292–299

© The Author(s) 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0095798413478072

jbp.sagepub.com



Wade W. Nobles<sup>1,\*</sup>

Black psychology is the critical discipline necessary to correct the limitations of Western psychology and the critically missing element from the discourse on Africa's renaissance and development. The discipline of Black psychology may, very well, serve as a key praxis in the restoration of the African mind, identity, and consciousness and the healing of humanity. Specific to the African world, it is my belief that the fundamental task and challenge<sup>1</sup> of Black psychologists is to defend and promote the interests and image of Africa and Africa's children by understanding the past, present, and future of our human story through the Africanization of the epistemological, terminological, aesthetic, and hermeneutical groundings of the scientific, artistic, and investigative discourse.

Contrary to popular perceptions, Black psychology, as being developed in the United States, is neither narrowly race-specific nor limited ethnically or geographically. It is the self-conscious "centering" of psychological analyses and applications in African realities, cultures, and epistemologies. African-centered psychology, as a system of thought and action, examines the processes that allow for the illumination and liberation of the spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence, African-centered psychology recognizes (a) the Spirit that permeates everything, (b) the idea that everything in the universe is interconnected, (c) the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence, and (d) the

<sup>1</sup>The Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family, Life and Culture, Inc., Oakland, CA, USA

\*Author's complete name is Wade W. Nobles *Ifagbemi Sangodare, Nana Kwaku Berko I, Bejana, Onebunne*

## Corresponding Author:

Wade W. Nobles, The Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family, Life and Culture, Inc., 1012, Linden Street, Oakland, CA 94607, USA.

Email: [drwade.nobles@iasbflc.org](mailto:drwade.nobles@iasbflc.org)

idea that communal self-knowledge is the key to mental health. African psychology is ultimately concerned with understanding the systems of meaning of human Beingness, the features of human functioning, and the restoration of the normal/natural order of human development.

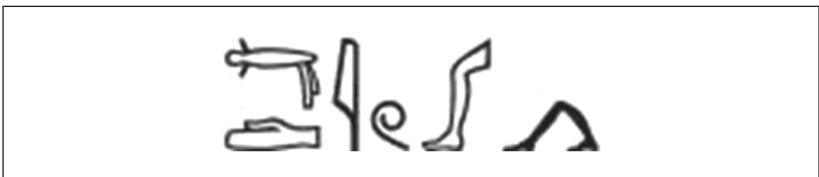
*Sakhu Sheti/Djaer*

The early 1970s saw the first introduction of African philosophy as the grounding for a new Black psychology (Nobles, 1972). During the next two decades several Black psychologists<sup>2</sup> joined in the excavation of ancient African ideas as grounding for the reemergence of a Black psychology. Na'im Akbar (1994) correctly connected the “stolen legacy” of the Greek term *Psychology* to the ancient African idea of *Sakhu*. The idea of *Sakhu* recognizes that a full understanding of reality acknowledges that spirit is the basis of all known and knowable phenomena and perceptions. As part of this ongoing dialog, in the late 1990s, I reintroduced the concept of *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* (Nobles, 1997) as a further refinement and deeper extension of Black psychology’s African essence. *Shk* means the understanding, the illuminator, the eye, and the soul of the being, that which inspires. (Massey, 2007).

The concept *Djr* means to probe deeply and widely in examination and, by extension, engage in a profound and prolonged probing into oneself in order to understand and assert one’s self and reality in the most dignity-affirming and expansive ways (Karenga, 2006).



Finally, the concept *Sdi* means to save, to preserve, to recover, to rescue, to reserve, to dig, to remove, to pull, to recite, to keep safe, to break, to take away, to maintain, to exact, to collect, hand over, deliver, to levy.<sup>3</sup>



In furthering the challenge of Black psychology to rescue Ancient African deep thought, I propose the adoption of *Skh Djr* as the process of understanding, examining, and explicating the meaning, nature, and functioning of being human for African people by conducting a deep, profound, and penetrating search, study, and mastery of the process of “illuminating” the human spirit or essence, as well as all human experience and phenomena.



I am also offering the concept or notion of *Skh Sdi* to represent the practice of *Sakhu*. Consistent with the African idea of “if it exists it most assuredly is spirit,” the *Skh Sdi* (*Sakhu* practitioner) would be “Spirits (humans) who are ‘lead’ by Spirit, who ‘read’ spirit(s); who seeks help and protection from Spirit and engages in the ‘salvation’ and ‘nurturing’ (healing) of Spirit by performing the *Sakhu* as it should be done.”



In the practice of *Sakhu* (illumination), I further suggest the rescue of the ancient construction of *irt hr skh*, which means doing illumination or performing the illumination as it should be done.<sup>4</sup>



As a contemporary operationalization of this notion, *irt hr skh* would mean to engage in a deep, profound, and penetrating search, study, understanding, and mastery of the process of illuminating the human spirit and reality by

1. "Clarifying" human definition, meaning, and resolute position/purpose in the world
2. "Analyzing and describing" the concrete human conditions that affect and influence our collective human development and consciousness
3. "Prescribing and exciting" solutions and actions that will free humanity from both material and spiritual degradation

*Sakhu Sheti* or *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* is offered as a penetrating search, study, and understanding, requiring an approach, application, and implementation that always seeks the deeper meaning of phenomena and explores both the visible and invisible aspects of reality. Parenthetically, it should be noted that within the Bantu-Kongo family of languages one can expect to find many terms and concepts equivalent to *Sakhu Sheti* (/sɔw Sdi/) that should be explored.<sup>5</sup>

The consistent challenge, herein, requires a constant search for the deeper meaning of phenomena and explores every (including the unseen) aspect of reality to fully understand and restore (heal) the phenomenon of being. As "epistemological reflection," the *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* axiomatically accepts that all phenomena of nature are "symbolic" writings, hidden in which are the forces and laws governing the material and spiritual aspects of the universe. Additionally, the *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* a priori accepts, as a "paradigmatic framework," that material expressions are only visible representations of the immaterial (invisible) qualities and functions of being and the objectification of things subjective in us and subliminal in nature. Accordingly, every recognizable element in nature is a "symbol" representing an essential function or law. Finally, the idea of *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* would require the development of a professional skill set whose goal would be to always seek and achieve deeper insight into every aspect of the real and the unreal. *Sakhu Sheti/Djaeris* offered as a corrective to European psychology.

The paradigmatic praxis implied by *Sakhu* has real and important implications for the Black/African psychologists as a *Sakhu* practitioner or *Sakhu Shetist*. In the further Africanization of Black psychology and, in response to the healing of humanity (Nobles, 2010), the ultimate task and challenge for Black psychology, as *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer*, will be to (a) reflect and protect the human integrity of all people; (b) serve as a guide into and for the future growth and development of humanity; (c) draw on a source of energy and understanding that will ignite and enhance the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of the human family; and (d) work to guarantee mental liberation,

intellectual enlightenment, cultural maturation, spiritual evolution, and ongoing human development.

In accepting the challenge of the illumination and restoration of humanity, the future charge of Black psychology as *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer* will be to (a) support ongoing and innovative research and publication regarding the discipline of Black African psychology and professional practice as an authentic intellectual project; (b) engage in the constant interrogation and obedience to African (both continental and diasporan) philosophical thought, belief systems, and human functioning; (c) support continuous “epistemological reflections” and refinement of requisite “skill set” and “paradigmatic framework”; and (d) encourage the rescue and utilization of African-centered language and logic of mental health and healing.

Finally, in response to the fundamental task and challenge associated with the restoration of humanity, Black psychology must offer a new understanding of being human and human well-being and mental health. In accepting the African meaning of being human as “a divine spirit housed in a physical container having a human experience,” I believe, parenthetically, that the idea of being spiritual or “spirituality” limits the full understanding of phenomena called human. Spirit is the life force or energy that comes from God. It is the totality of being, becoming, and belonging to God. Spirit is the Divine spark that gives the human being their “(be)ingness.” It is the essence of which “(be)coming” is an ongoing expression. Spirit is the evidence that humans “(be)long” to a Divinely governed natural order. It is that which enlivens the body and lives on after the body dies.” To be human is to be spirit in a reality of spirit. Accordingly, I have offered the notion of “spiritness” (Nobles, 2000) as the concept pertaining to the condition of being a spirit. Given the African idea of *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer*, that is, Black psychology, as an unfolding proposition, I would finally suggest as a preliminary definition of human well-being and mental health that “when the *human spirit* is well, whole, and healthy, the spirit (human) being is characterized by confidence, competence, and a sense of full possibility and unlimited potentiality.”

### **Author's Note**

This article was part of the ICP Focal Symposium: The Association of Black Psychology.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

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

## Funding

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

## Notes

1. The author believes that the evolution of Black psychology will ultimately come to classify itself as *Sakhu Sheti/Djaer*. However, in the writing of this article the terms *Black psychology*, *African psychology*, *African/Black psychology*, and *African-centered Black psychology* will be used and are used interchangeably.
2. The reader is invited to examine the following works: Clark, McGee, Nobles, and Weems (1975); King, Dixon, and Nobles (1976); Na'im (1984, 1990); Hilliard (1986); Nobles (1986a, 1986b, 1997); Myers (1988); Kambon (1992); Wilson (1993); and Grills and Rowe (1996).
3. Asar Imhotep provided the transliteration and glyphs for each of the concepts discussed in this article. Asar Imhotep is a computer programmer and Africana researcher from Houston, Texas. He is the founder of the MOCHA-Versity Institute of Philosophy and Research and the Madu-Ndela Institute for the Advancement of Science and Culture and the author of *The Bakala of North America*; *The Living Suns of Vitality: In Search for a Meaningful Name for African-Americans*; *Passion of the Christ or Passion of Osiris: The Kongo Origins of the Jesus Myth*; and *Ogun, African Fire Philosophy and the Meaning of KMT*.
4. The meaning and function of the *Sakhu* Priest as identified on a relief from the private tomb at Sakkarah from the ninth or tenth Dynasty was provided by Professor Theophile Obenga, the foremost living Egyptologist in the world today in a personal communication, 2005.
5. For instance, the concepts of *Shushukulu*, *Nkindi*, *Nganga*, and *Nkondi* are all congruent with *Sakhu Sheti*. *Shushukulu* means "a being who has eyes in the physical world as well as in the spiritual world. Door that sees both sides. Neither the inside or outside has a secret." *Shushukulu*, in the singular is *Nkindi*. "*Nkindi* is a specialist or a scholar in the art/way of thinking." The *Nkindi* is a *Shushukulu* in the art or manner of "making, building, developing, weaving, stretching, extending, expanding, creating, and inventing" thoughts or ideas. The *ciLuba* concept of *Endela* is one *who* seeks, researches, probes, and inquires about." A *shushukulu*, *nkindi*, or *nganga* is not only qualified to deal with physical issues but is able to communicate and address issues of the spirit: They have "eyes" in both worlds. They are not only wise men/women, they are therapist, and they are healer. These traditional African concepts all have importance for illuminating the idea of *Sakhu Sheti*.

## References

- Akbar, N. (1994). *Light from ancient Africa*. Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions.
- Clark, C. X., McGee, D. P., Nobles, W. W., & Weems, L. X. (1975). Voodoo or IQ: An introduction to African psychology. *Journal of Black Psychology, 1*, 1-20.
- Grills, C., & Rowe, D. (1996). African traditional medicine: Implications for African-centered approaches to healing. In R. Jobes (Ed.), *Advances in African American psychology: Theory, paradigms and research* (pp. 71-102). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.
- Hilliard, A. G., III. (1986). The wisdom of Kemetic governance. In M. Karenga & J. Carruthers (Eds.), *Kemet and the African worldview*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Kambon, K. K. K. (1992). *The African personality in America: An African-centered framework*. Tallahassee, FL: Nubian Nation.
- Karenga, M. (2006). *MAAT: The moral idea in ancient Egypt: A study in classical African ethics*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankora Press.
- King, L., Dixon, V. J. & Nobles, W. W. (Eds.). (1976). *African philosophy: Assumptions and paradigms for research on Black persons*. Los Angeles, CA: Charles R. Drew Postgraduate Medical School.
- Massey, G. (2007). *A book of the beginnings*. London, England: Kessinger. (Original work published 1881)
- Myers, L. J. (1988). *Understanding an Afrocentric worldview*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hall.
- Na'im, A. (1984). Africentric social science for human liberation. *Journal of Black Studies, 14*, 395-414.
- Na'im, A. (1990). African American consciousness and Kemet: Spirituality, symbolism and duality. In M. Karenga (Ed.), *Reconstructing Kemetic culture: Papers, perspectives, projects* (pp. 99-114). Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Nobles, W. W. (1986a). *African psychology: Toward its reclamation, reascension and revitalization*. Oakland, CA: Black Family Institute.
- Nobles, W. W. (1986b). Ancient Egyptian thought and the renaissance of African (Black) psychology. In M. Karenga & J. Carruthers (Eds.), *Kemet and the African worldview: Research, rescue, and restoration* (pp. 100-118). Los Angeles, CA: University of Sankore Press.
- Nobles, W. W. (1972). African Philosophy: Foundation for Black Psychology. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Black psychology* (1st ed., pp. 18-32). New York: Harper & Row.
- Nobles, W. W. (1997). To be African or not to be: The question of identity or authenticity—Some preliminary thoughts. In R. Jones (Ed.), *African American*

- identity development: Theory, research and intervention* (pp. 185-206). Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.
- Nobles, W. W. (2000). Breaking the code of spirit(ness) and consciousness. In *Seeking the Sanku: Foundational writings for an African psychology* (pp. 341-350). Chicago, IL: Third World Press.
- Nobles, W. W. (2010, May). African well being and the healing of humanity. *Imhotep Journal, African Healing Traditions*, 7. San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA.
- Wilson, A. S. (1993). *The falsification of Afrikan consciousness: Eurocentric history, psychiatry and the politics of White supremacy*. Bronx, NY: Afrikan World Infosystems.