

African Centered Psychology



Strategies for Psychological Survival & Wellness

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“When the indigenous psychologies are incorporated into a universal framework, we will have a universal psychology.”

Triandis (1996)

Ideological Oppression: Western Psychology Deconstruction and De-Conditioning

- The invention of the construct of psychology
- The codification of ideas
- Defined who we are as psychologists
- Deconstruction = Cognitive dissonance

Western Psychology:

- **Quantitative**
- **Empirical**
- **Focuses on natural science**

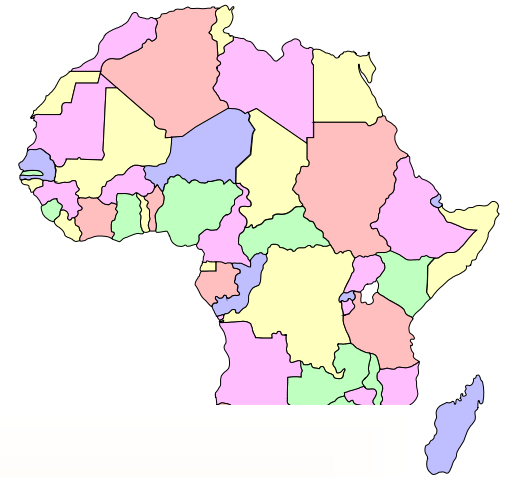
African Psychology:

- **Qualitative**
- **Contextual**
- **Focuses on human science**

Critique of Western Psychology

- Its methods
- Its samples
- Its choice of research problems
- Its evaluations
- Its culturally myopic theories
- Its de-spiritualization

African Psychology



Culture-Based Treatment

Starts with the recognition that culture is highly relevant to people's everyday behavior. Our values, shared history and experience, and language all affect how we see things, how we feel, and what matters to us.

Most important, culture is motivational—it affects our choice of goals and our level of commitment to them.

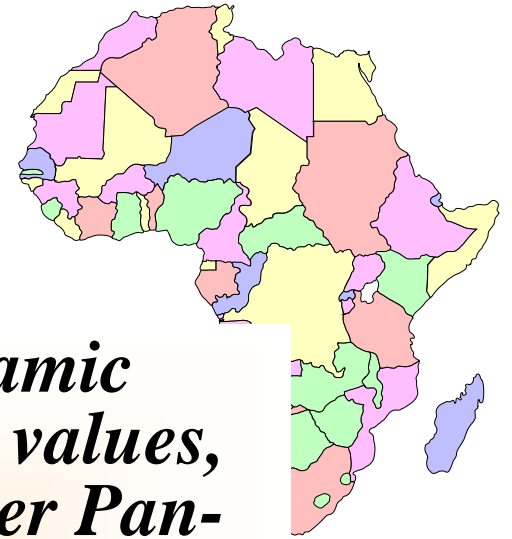
African Centered Psychology

Culture Based Treatment

- Culture-based therapy also expands the “treatment agenda” to include discussion of social context, history, racism, and other group-relevant issues which the client deems relevant.
- For example, with respect to substance abuse, culture is one of the factors that can determine a person’s particular set of pros and cons for recovery. A culture-based therapist works with the client to identify the cultural factors, as well as the personal factors, most likely to motivate recovery.

African Centered Psychology

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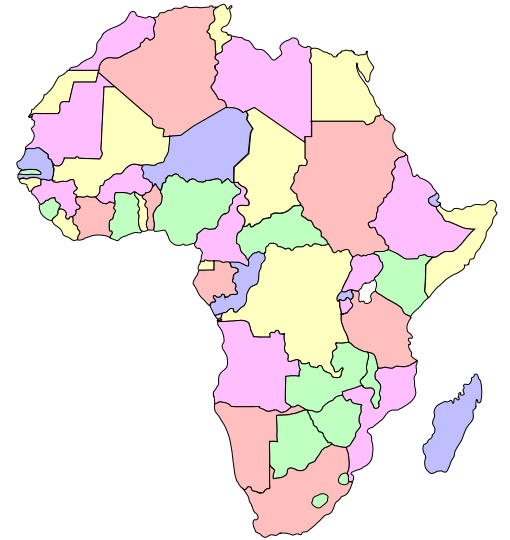


•Black/African Centered psychology is a dynamic manifestation of unifying African principles, values, and traditions that are reflected within broader Pan-African or transcultural communities.

•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



African centered psychology recognizes:





- the Spirit that permeates everything that is;*
- the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected;*
- the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence; and*
- the 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 normal/natural order to human development. As such, it is used to resolve personal and social problems and to promote optimal functioning."

*Principles of
African Centered Psychology &
World View
Integrally Tied to*

- ❖ **African science, philosophy, & values**
- ❖ **African reality, culture & epistemology**
- ❖ **Illumination and liberation of the spirit**

*African Centered Psychology Recognizes
That:*

-  **Spirit Permeates Everything**
-  **Universe Is Interconnected**
-  **Collective/Ancestral Element**
-  **Communal Consciousness**

An African Paradigm

 **makes a distinction between the user and the thing used**

→ **user = soul**

→ **thing used = body**

 **between the manifestations and source of consciousness**

→ **manifestation = awareness, cognition**

→ **source = the soul conferred by the divine**

*African Concepts Have Implications for Our
Conceptualizations of:*

- ✉ **Human Beingness**
- ✉ **Human Functioning**
- ✉ **Human \Development**

Levels of Reality

- ◆ **Nea Wohu (can see)**
- ◆ **Nea Wonhu (can't see)**
- ◆ **Nea etra adwen (imperceivable)**

Reality

Consciousness Preterational Consciousness

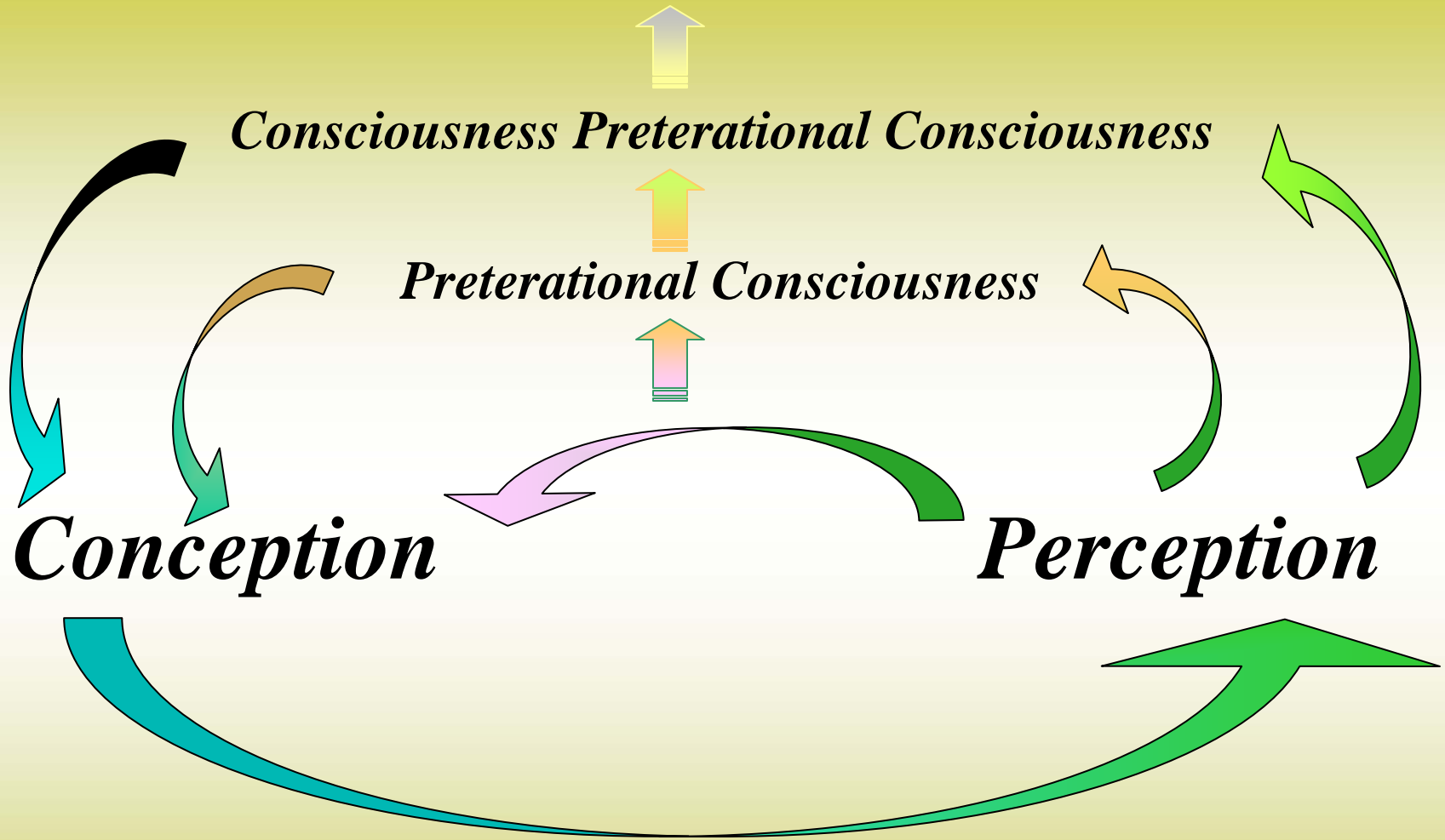
Preterational Consciousness

Conception

Perception

Consciousness

Successive Approximations to Reality



African Psychology:

- ✉ **Must define human beingness as a cosmic evolutionary process**
- ✉ **Reflects a detailed cosmogony**
- ✉ **Result is not a behavioral psychology but a cosmogonic psychology (Dr. Kumodjie, 2000)**

what the Ewe would call “sekologo” sekologo - (se) law/destiny; (ko) law manifest self as mind 1st then matter; (logo) mystery of the creator; “knowledge of the mystery & law of behavior, mind and matter”

Basic Principles

Holdstock (2000) identified several precepts including:

- Nothing exists in isolation.
- Life is sacred, a communion of souls, and transcends the limitations of space and time.
- Life is cyclical, a constant renaissance requiring an inner renewal of humankind to keep pace with renewal occurring in the cosmos.
- Life cannot be evaluated from a linear perspective.
- African psychology subsumes attention to African religion and spirituality.
- The natural world is imbued with power beyond that which can be understood by Western logic.
- Intuitive reasoning is important and very sophisticated.

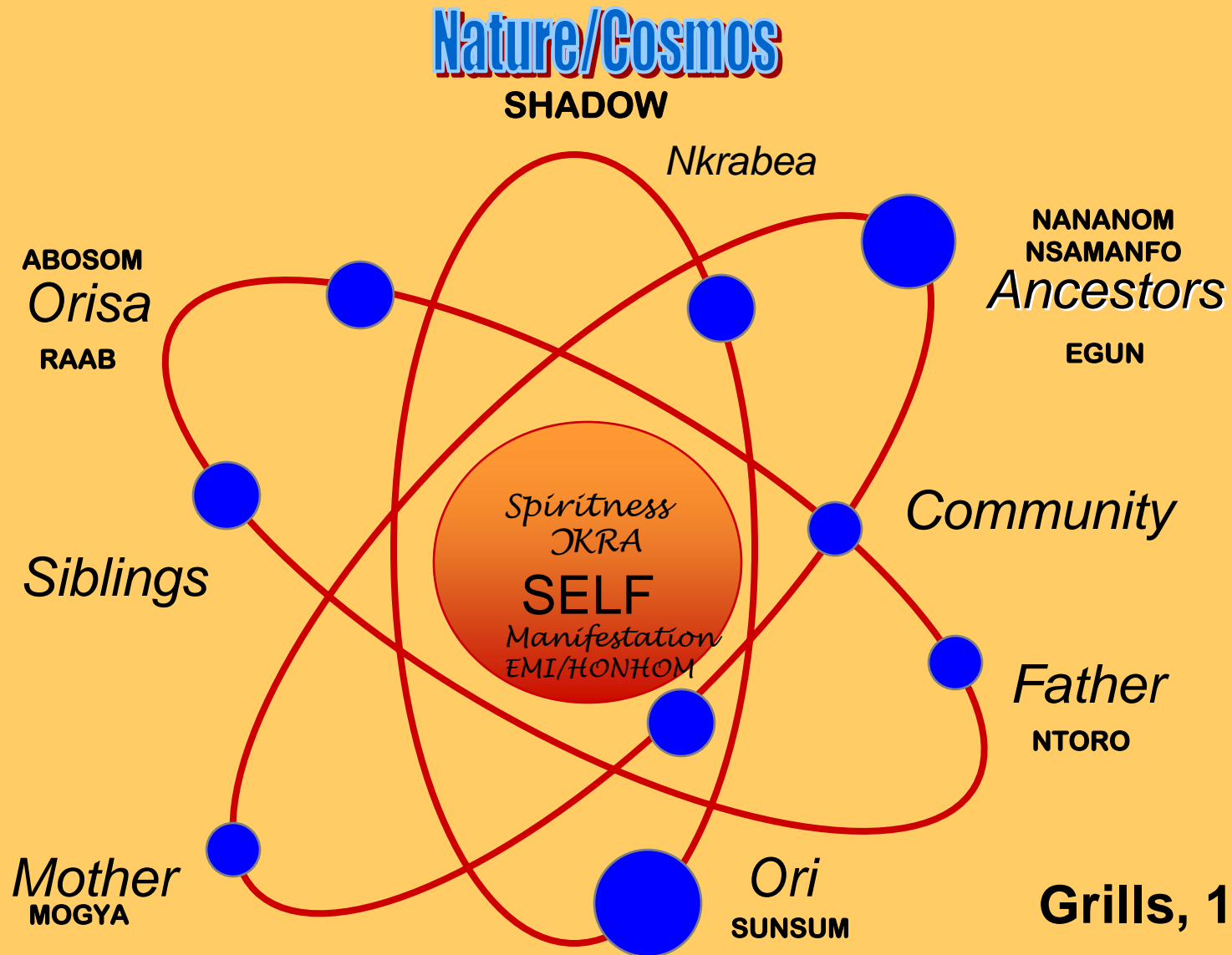
Basic Principles

- There is vital force in people, plants, animals and inanimate objects that is not time bound making the past as important as the present.
- Not all forces are equal and one must discover one's relation to the other forces. The human being is not just a vital force but a vital force in participation.
- A person 'alone' as an isolated being lacks power and definition or identity.
- The ancestors are considered the living dead reflecting the distinction between the West and Africa on the demarcation of life and death. As the living dead they remain in relationship to the living.
- African humanism (ubuntu to the Nguni which is distinctly different from Western types of humanism) is inherently anti-individualistic and pro-communalistic, spiritual, transcendental, and centrifugal. Respect, dignity, solidarity, compassion, and survival are thought to be the five fingers of ubuntu (Mbigi and Maree, 1995).
- African society is other-centered and living is about cooperation not competition.

Basic Principles

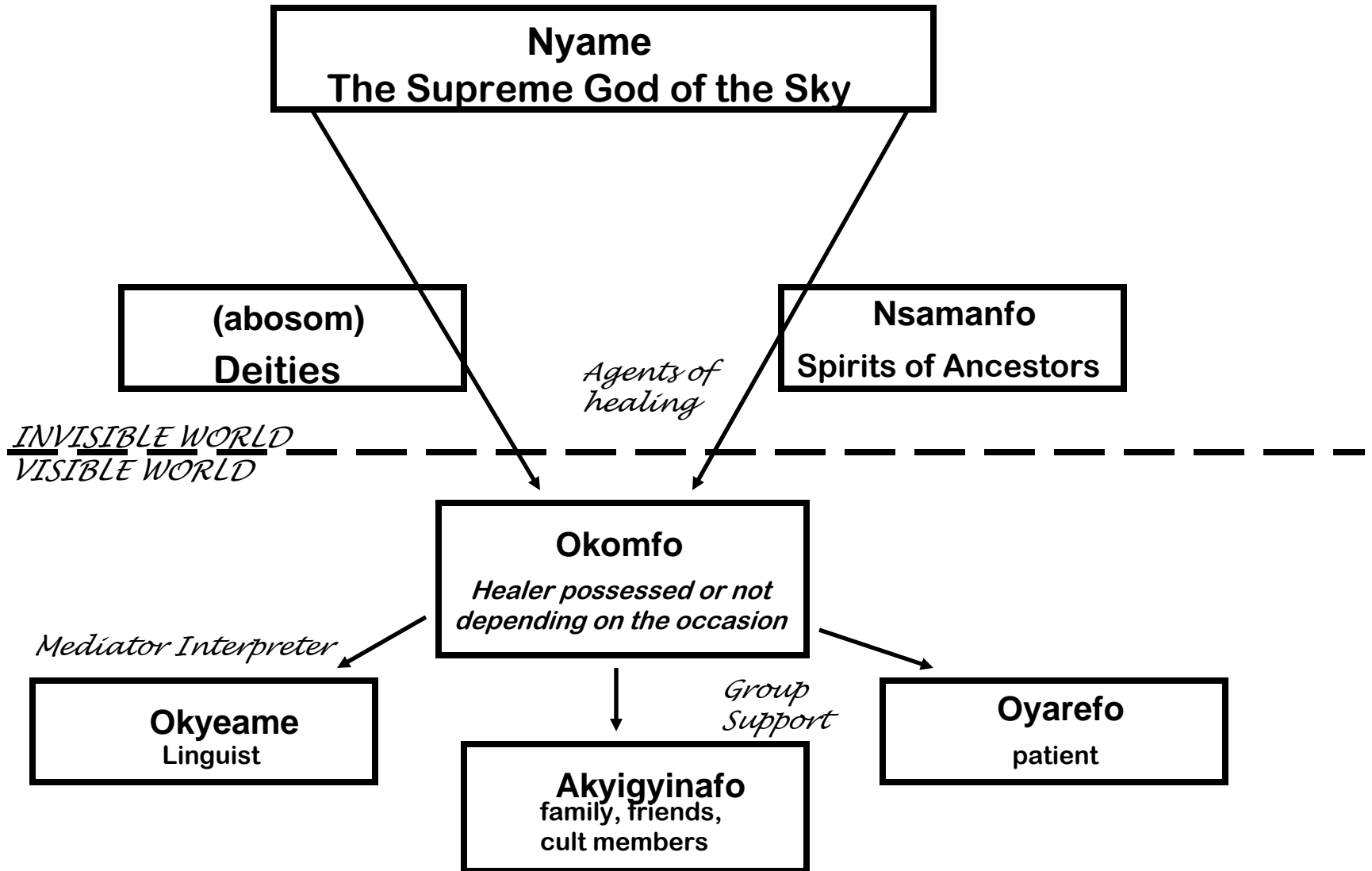
- Self in relation to other is the focus of individual experience.
- In contrast to the western self as thinker, the African view is the self as actor. ‘By your actions you are known. For example, by reducing widespread job or relationship difficulties to ‘manageable’ personal problems, traditional (western) psychotherapy diverts energy and legitimacy from efforts to transform work, community, or societal institutions; it reinforces the false belief that we can determine our own outcomes if we simply work hard to find the socially appropriate individual solution” (Fox, 2000, p. 27). Likewise, by reducing strained interpersonal relationships to spiritual dynamics alone, traditional African psychology could divert energy away from important social and interpersonal work that needs to occur for an individual, family, or community.
- The self is in intimate relationship with other people and with the animate and inanimate world of nature, the ancestors and spirits.

African Concept of Self



Grills, 1997

Interaction in a Healing Occasion



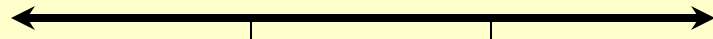
Ayim-Aboagye, 1993

A Therapeutic Encounter

GOD

**RHYTHMS/FORCES
OF**

client



therapist

ori

ori

egun

egun

orisa

orisa

Nature

GOD

GOD

GOD

Akan Concepts of Human Beingness

An African Definition of The Person

The Key to Understanding Consciousness

◆ **Okra** (the life principle; the soul; given by the creator - the breath of God infused into the human being; container of destiny; its presence manifest in breath; its exit=death; the seat of the mind; the essence of the human being; the physical body is but a mere expression of the state of the okra; does not die)

◆ **Sunsum** (spirit//accounts for one's character, personality; can leave the body (sleep state); protective spirit; found in people and things - eg, it is the sunsum in plants that speak to people; sunsum is to okra as gas is to a car - and it can low or high octane)

Sunsum Shadow (sunsum in the metaphysical realm)

Constructs Continued

◆ **Ntoro/Egyabosom** (father's influence and family spirit connection - connection to bosom --> spirit)

◆ **Mogya** (blood; derived from mother; connection to a clan and the ancestors; container of the nkrabea; the vessel thru which the okra travels; combines w/ father's semen for procreation; equivalent power/function to semen and breast milk; contains power; visible aspect of the okra; is your fire - mo=your//gya=fire; note: women's menstruation maintains their contact with the ancestors - it revives the ancestors & in past would go into seclusion to have the spiritual bond between the living and the dead)

- ◆ **Nkrabea** (destiny selected or given; approved by God)
- ◆ **Dzen** (name); **da dzen** (day name) or **Kradzen/Kradin** (soul name) related to the 7 souls of God; name affects the character of person; can be used to call a person out of a coma
- ◆ **Ahom** (breath)
- ◆ **Tiboa** (the man in your head; conscience; seeing from inside - when you do this you know what is right to maintain what is good for your okra; only those with okra can have tiboa)
- ◆ **Kikoro** (the key in your head - opens up your brain; to lose it is to lose your mind)

- ◆ **Yikyere** (revelations by dreams, divination or atenka)
- ◆ **Atenka** (immediate apprehension - feeling about something through a form of vibration; your okra is speaking to you)
- ◆ **Tumi** (power; both socially prescribed and spiritually imbued)
- ◆ **Tiboa** (the man in your head; conscience; seeing from inside - when you do this you know what is right to maintain what is good for your okra; only those with okra can have tiboa)

African Consciousness - Findings/Concepts

- **Wholistic** Conceptualization of Beingness
- Elements of the Self Must Be In **Harmony** With Each Other, the Community, Nature and the Spiritual Realm
- There Are Levels of **Reality**, Methods of **Knowing** and **Spiritual** Factors Which Can Influence Health & Wellness
- **Cause & Effect** In African Science More Consistent With Models in Quantum Physics
- Consciousness Is **Not Limited** to Thought/Cognition
- Consciousness Is The State of Being **In Relation to.....**
- **Spirit, Vibration, Energy, Blood, Ritual, Taboos** Related to Consciousness
- Consciousness Is Directly Related to One's Connection To **The Divine** (To God); Consciousness = An Instrument of The Divine

African Consciousness - Findings/Concepts

- Consciousness Is A Function of the **Soul** (Okra)
- Altered States of Consciousness & Processes Like Dreams, Intuition, and Trance **Inform Normal Waking Consciousness**
- Spirit Is A **Stimulating Power** That Moves the Mind
- Humans Are An **Immortal Spirit** Temporarily Residing in A Physical Body and Eventually Returns to the Eternal.
- The **Essential Elements** in This Process Include: the soul (okra or emi), spirit (sunsum or ori), destiny (nkrabea or ipin), path into world and day name (kradin or odu), spirits which guide, protect, and inform (abosom or orisa), ancestors (nananom nsamanfo or egun), blood (mogya or eje), breath (hohom), taboos (akyiwade), dreams (ala)

Levels of Awareness of Self

“Authentic Consciousness”

There can be no “I” without a “We”

- ✦ Socio-historical Awareness of Self
- ✦ Psychological Awareness of Self
- ✦ Ancestral Awareness of Self
- ✦ Spiritual Awareness of Self
- ✦ Destiny/Purpose Awareness of Self

Defining Altruism and Compassion

Compassionate

Love

Intrapersonal

Compassionate love (being present and experiencing the situation of the other, fueled by a deep love and sense of connection to others)

Altruistic

Love

Interpersonal

Altruistic love (helping behavior inspired in part by the capacity to unite with others at a deeper level of the self)

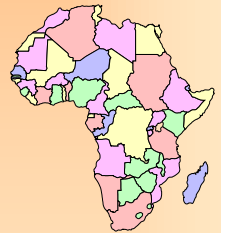
This Conceptualization

- Emphasizes a primarily **cognitive** process in which the individual suppresses his or her usual egocentric outlook and imagines how the world appears to others (Davis, 1994).

Further Distinctions

- ***Perceptual Role Taking*** (the ability to imagine the literal visual perspective of another),
- ***Cognitive Role Taking*** (the ability to imagine others' thoughts and motives) and
- ***Affective Role Taking*** (the ability to infer another's emotional state).

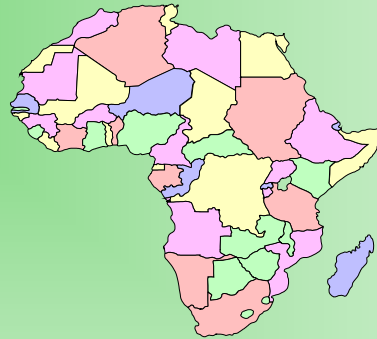
From an African worldview what is missing among other things is:



- ***Spiritual Role Sharing*** (the ability to connect with another person at the level of spirit (sunsum) and soul (okra)).

Shifting the Frame To An African Perspective

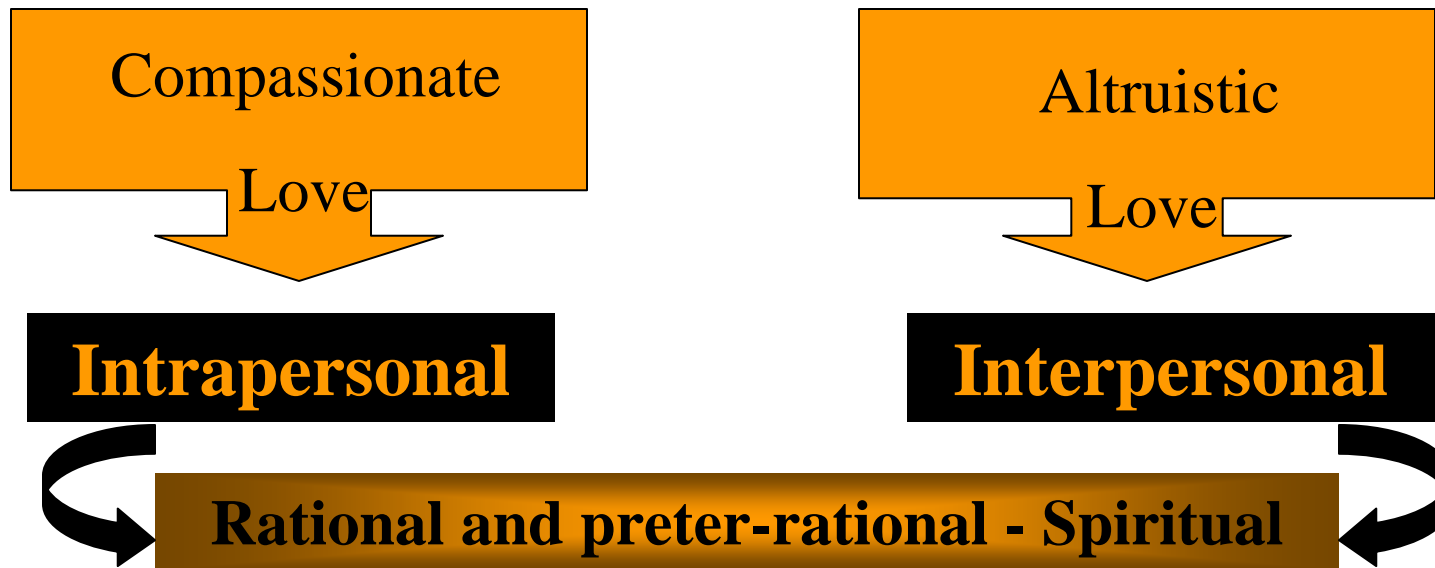
Akan compassionate love and altruistic love



Based on a conceptualization of the self as one with the other

- ✓ In the Akan concept, self is an extension of the other,
- ✓ The presence of spirit (sunsum), soul (okra), deities (abosom), and ancestors (nananom nsamanfo) (Ajei and Grills, 2000) provides the connective fiber linking self to others and must be part of any explanation of human behavior.

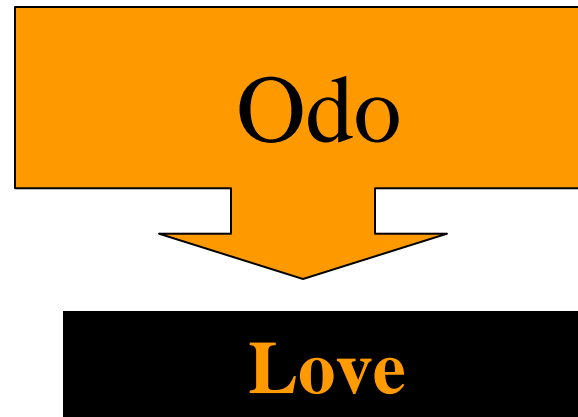
Akan Conceptualization



Sensitivity (empathy) to the needs of others derives from psycho-spiritually based phenomena in Akan beliefs and is reinforced by cultural norms and practices

One is both self & one with the other with points of choice regarding the extent of identification with the self in others & the desire to extend help in the face of clear or imagined need.

Akan Conceptualization



Were: Inexhaustible energy associated with odo.

The undeniable desire (*expressed as feelings*) of two complimentary “spirits” to merge, extend and/or expand into oneness.

Accordingly, "making love" is the ultimate physio-“spiritual” expression of the desire of two beings (spirits) to merge, extend and/or expand the spirit.

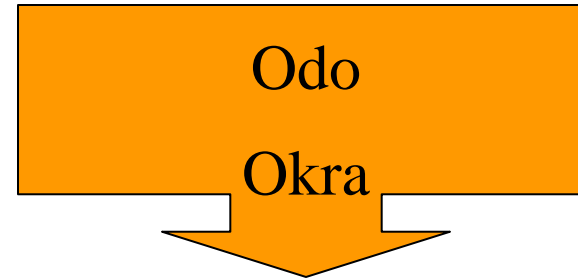
The desire to procreate is a sign stimulus or indicator of the spirit's (*being*) need to expand or extend its expression (*becoming*) into a new life form (*belonging*).

Akan Conceptualization "Odo"



Heart Love

Recognized by "Atenka", immediate apprehension when the spiritual force of your conscience (Okra) speaks to you such that you experience "Nsaka", the feeling of being touched by, feeling deeply toward, attracted to, or making contact or connection with another so as to stimulate "awerekyekyer" (gentle, comforting spirit) and expand into a greater force.



Soul Love

The desire of that aspect of the person, given by God, i.e., soul, to connect with itself in other beings. It is experienced as a oneness with other, or the recognition of the extension of self in others. Odo Okra compels one to accept the circumstances experienced by other souls as their own, resulting in a desire to help

"M' akoma wo wo mu."

"My heart is in you."

An Akan way of saying I love you. Akoma refers not to the physical heart but the spiritual heart.

Akoma Ntoaso

**Joined // Linked
Hearts**



An extension of akoma

Love and Goodwill

This adrinka symbol Intensifies and magnifies the meaning of love and likeness of akoma and suggests an amplification of the basic concept.

Applications

African Concepts of Consciousness

Applied to
Substance Abuse
Treatment
Engagement



- The client, in the context of exploring their substance use, is offered the opportunity to critically examine the question, “who am I”.
- The direction of clinical inquiry is not limited simply to consideration of genetics, the immediate influence of environment such as family, neighborhood etc, personality, cognitive style, and learning.
- It extends beyond these things to include reflection on the divine source of one’s being and one’s fundamental “purpose” or “destiny” in life.





Basic Premise

African-centered approach to drug treatment is a culturally based method grounded in the premise that to be maximally effective with the African American client, the therapist must be attentive to at least five factors that impact the client's life:

- Spiritual realities
- Cultural realities
- Historical realities
- Sociocultural realities and
- Political and racial realities



Essential Elements of the Intervention

Contextualizing the intervention in a community setting actively engaged in community development, social justice, community organizing and drug prevention work

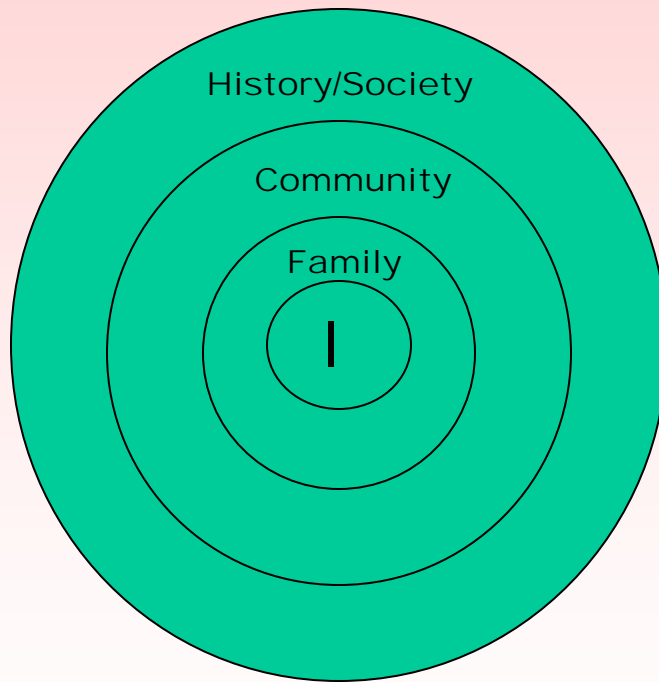
- Creating an environment that speaks to an African/African American ethos with African American music playing, posters on the walls depicting African proverbs and values, people gathered engaged in the work of supporting the community, and the scent of familiar smells (foods, incense etc).

- Completing an intake interview in which information on client personal history, drug use, stage of change, perceptions of treatment and ethnic identity are gathered
Sharing a meal with the client that fosters a more intimate replication of the familiar gathering in the household kitchen; having a conversation over food that is common in many African American households. During the meal, community is simulated as the counselor and client are joined by people from the community who share in conversation and food.

- Use of an 18-minute video developed by the team to convey cultural, communal, and contextual information in a standardized way for the purpose of expanding the analysis of substance abuse in the African American community, highlight African American cultural values, and create the opportunity for dramatic relief. The video was designed to illustrate issues related to ethnic identity, relationships among African Americans, self-esteem, community conditions, pathways to recovery, spirituality and destiny/purpose in life, alienation and reintegration back into the community among others.

- Finally, we strove for an equal relationship between counselor and client. This meant avoiding the sort of interaction in which counselors remain socially distant, non-disclosing, and authoritative. Our counselors were to be open, respectful, and non-confronting.

Elements and Processes



- See Handouts

AMI Outcomes

- Data collected at the end of the session showed that people randomized to the culture-based motivational condition were more involved in the counseling, more willing to self-disclose, more motivated to seek help for drug problems, and higher on preparation for change.
- When we re-contacted participants one year later, we found that those who experienced the culture-based counseling were less likely to be using illegal drugs, as indicated by self-report as well as a urine test. See Figure [center the fig and fix misspelling in fig title].
- These findings indicate that motivational intervention, delivered in a brief (one session) format and a culturally competent manner, can be effective in promoting recovery from drug use.
- We have successfully adapted the intervention as a method of delivering HIV education in a multi-session, small-group format. The groups typically include African American and Latino drug users.

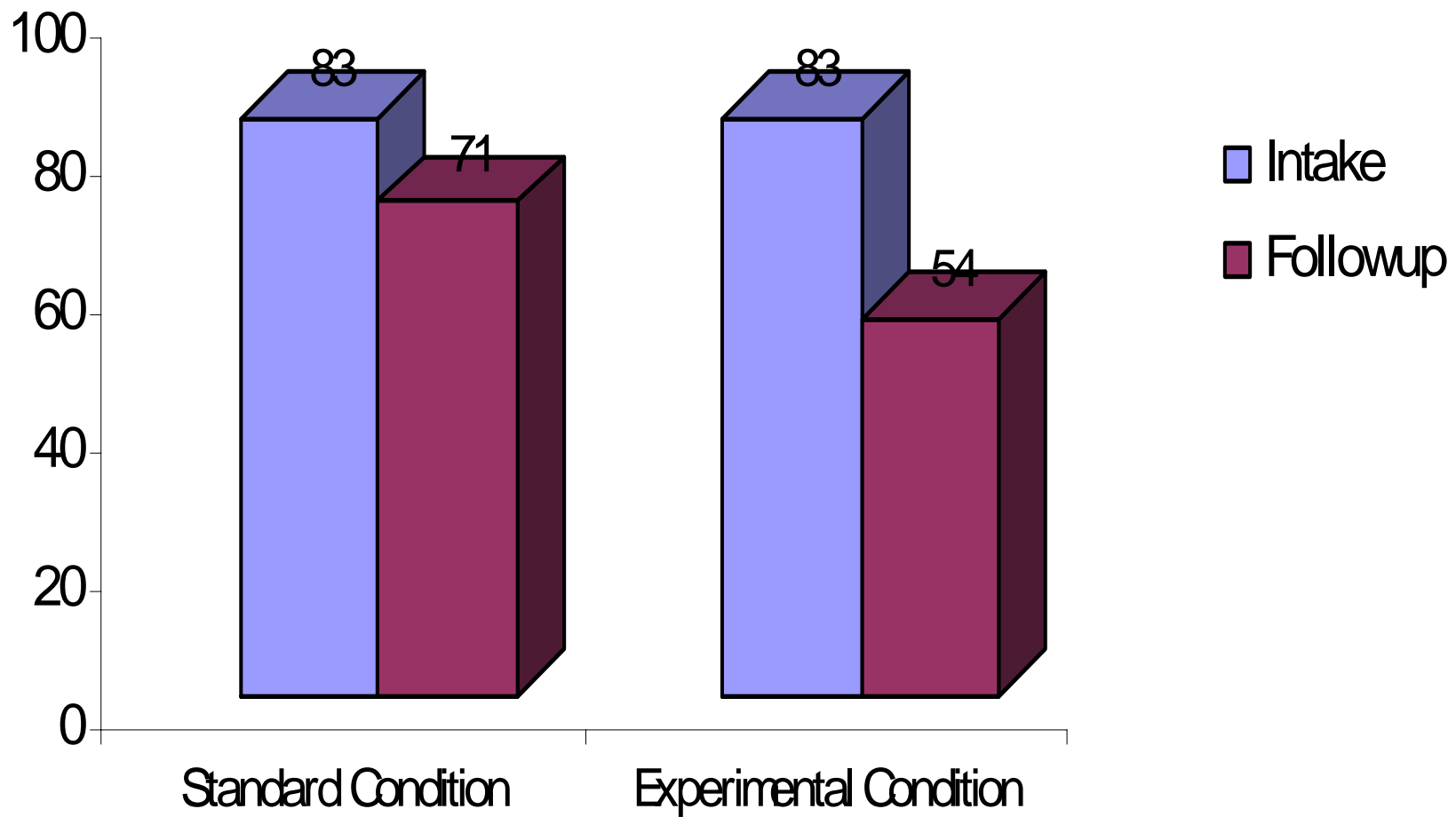
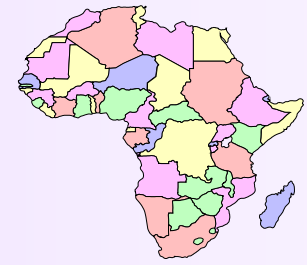


Figure 1: Percentage Using Drugs at intake and Followup



Competency Implications

AFRICAN-AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY

Proposed Practice Competencies Parham (2005)

AWARENESS

- Therapists must be cognizant of his or her own personal biases and assumptions about African-descent people.
- Therapist must be aware of how they have been impacted by the MAAFA, a great disaster of death and destruction beyond human comprehension and convention. The chief feature is the denial of the humanity of African people (Ani, 1994) and how the residuals from those experiences impact their lives.
- Therapist must be aware of his or her own role as “healers”.
- Therapist must have access to his or her own historical memories about the majesty of African life and culture as well as the pain and tragedy of historical and contemporary Black suffering.
- Therapist must be aware of how people and elements in the universe are interconnected.

AWARENESS (continued)

- Therapist must have a sense of his or her own essence as spirit and be in touch with his or her own spirituality.
- Therapist must have a relationship with the divine force in the universe.
- Therapist must have strong knowledge of himself or herself and provide answers to the three critical questions: Who am I? Am I who I say I am? Am I all I ought to be (Fanon, 1996)
- Therapist must have a sense of his or her own ethnic consciousness, which is not simply anchored in race (biology), but in the shared struggle and collective heritage of African people.
- Therapist must have a vision for African-descent people that embraces the transformative possibilities of the human spirit.
- Therapist must be aware of how to move from possessing intellect to dispensing wisdom.

KNOWLEDGE

- Knowledge of African psychology and history in ancient Kemetic, historical African, and contemporary African-American societies.
- Knowledge of the essential components of an African-centered worldview.
- Knowledge of the principle of Ma'at.
- Knowledge of the limitations of traditional Euro-American psychological perspectives when applied to African-descent people.
- Knowledge of how science has been used as a tool of oppression; and the principle of "Scientific Colonialism" (Nobles, 1986).
- Knowledge of the limitations of traditional approaches to therapy.
- Knowledge of the characteristics and dynamics of personality development.
 - Dimensions of the soul (Akbar, 1994; Nobles, 1986).
 - Dimensions of African character (i.e., Ma'at).
 - Models of nigrescence (i.e., Cross, Thomas, Parham & Helms).
 - Models of African self-consciousness (Kambon, 1995).
 - Models of optimal psychological functioning (Myers)

KNOWLEDGE (continued)

- Knowledge of assessment instruments appropriate for use with African-descent adults, youth, and children.
- Knowledge of the limitations of traditional assessment instruments when used with African-Americans.
- Knowledge of therapeutic rituals.
- Knowledge of the diagnostic nosologies used to classify disordered behaviors in African-Americans.
- Knowledge of the ethical principles germane to treating African-descent people.
- Knowledge of how traditional ethical standards of some psychological and counseling associations may be culturally inappropriate for African-descent people.
- Knowledge of a geopolitical view of African people and their condition in America and throughout the world.
- Knowledge of what racism and White Supremacy are and how individual, institutional, and cultural racism impact the lives of African descent people (e.g. Ani's concept of Maafa; Pierce's concepts of Extreme mundane stress & microaggressions; Akbar's concept of Psychological slavery; Franklin concept of invisibility syndrome; Kambon's concept of cultural misorientation).

SKILLS

- Ability to maximize congruence between healing messages and proper conduct
- Ability to connect with, bond with, or otherwise establish rapport with African-American clients
- Ability to conduct, participate in, and/or create rituals that facilitate the healing process
- Ability to hear both the surface structure and deep structure messages as client communicates
- Ability to administer and interpret culturally appropriate assessment instruments.
- Ability to advocate on behalf of clients to social agencies and institutions.
- Ability to utilize theories and constructs in forming diagnostic impressions.
- Ability to facilitate awareness in clients.
- Ability to establish appropriate goals with clients.
- Ability to promote wellness and well-being rather than focusing on dysfunctional behavior
- Ability to know and consciously use the knowledge of African-centered thought and philosophy in therapeutic settings