

Theories of African American Personality: Classification, Basic Constructs and Empirical Predictions/Assessment

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Abstract: This article represents a brief overview and review of the state of contemporary theories of African American personality. A slight modification of an earlier scheme put forth by Kambon (1992, 1998) provides the organizational framework for the analysis. The scheme comprises three classifications of such theories: Eurocentric Approaches, Transitional Africentric Approaches and Africentric Approaches. The addition of the *Transitional* Africentric Approach is designed to better capture approaches that represent more or less a *hybrid* or *diffuse* version including basic aspects of both the Eurocentric and Africentric approaches, yet reflecting at the same time a slowly but definite movement away from the Eurocentric toward the Africentric approach (“Transitioning”). A more or less composite of the Eurocentric Approach is presented, while the William Cross model of Nigrescence is discussed as representative of the Transitional Africentric Approach. Much of the discussion of the Africentric approach is taken from previous manuscripts by the authors (Kambon, 1998; Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2009) and emphasizes Kambon’s African Self-Consciousness model as representative. The major thrust of the article emphasizes what are the key-central constructs of the representative models (both core and peripheral), as well as the changes that have occurred in these models over the past quarter of a century or more since their introduction, and the general status of the research that is associated with the main paradigms involved. Finally, we give some limited consideration to some of the seemingly pressing issues in the short-term future outlook for the field.

I. Introduction

Perhaps no other area of African/Black Psychology has such a legacy of controversy and strident intellectual debate than the area of Theories of African American (AA) personality (Belgrave & Allison, 2006; Cross, 1991; Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2006; Thomas & Sillen, 1972; Wilcox, 1971). This has not only been because of the legacy of the notorious contentiousness of the literature on AA intelligence, but also the subsequent literature on AA self-concept/racial identity and self-esteem, as well as the focus on AA motivation (i.e., achievement motivation) and antisocial behaviors such as drug abuse, delinquency, violence and criminality (Belgrave & Allison, 2006; Cross, 1991; Jones, 1972, 1980, 1991, 2004; Kambon, 1992, 1998; Pettigrew, 1964; Wilson, 1993). Each of these areas of the psychological study of AA personality has brought to the table their own set of controversial theoretical models, methodologies, data bases, analyses and conclusions. Through the years and as a result of the accumulation of a relatively large amount of research data and theoretical constructs, a distinct area of study called AA Personality has emerged within the African-centered psychological literature (Baldwin, 1976; Kambon, 1992, 1998) that commands serious consideration in any social policies respectful of cultural diversity that focus on truly improving the lives of all of the population. Thus, the growing body of psychological literature focused on African American personality will be discussed in this article in terms of the following considerations: (1) Classification of Basic Theoretical Paradigms, (2) Core Constructs and Empirical Predictions and Assessments, and (3) Future Directions of this important area of focus in African-Centered Psychology.

II. Classification of Theories of African American Personality: Basic Theoretical Paradigms

What then have emerged as the basic theoretical paradigms in this area of study and knowledge? Azibo (1990) has used such classifications as Positivists versus Negativist-Pejeorativists to categorize these paradigms, whereas Kambon (1992, 1998) has proposed the categories of *Africentric* versus *Non-Africentric* as more appropriate to capture the distinguishing features of these paradigms. Kambon's (1992, 1998) work has been the primary guide in the development of classification schemes relevant to this area.

More similar to Kambon, but incorporating many features from Azibo's scheme as well, we propose that three distinct approaches or paradigms seem to have emerged and have come to characterize contemporary work in this area. They might best be designated as (1) Eurocentric Models, (2) Transitional Africentric Models, and (3) Africentric Models. This schematic is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Contrasting Africentric and Non-Africentric Approaches to African American Personality Theories

African Personality Paradigms: Modification of Kobi Kambon's Schematic

PARAMETERS	AFRICENTRIC THEORIES	NON-AFRICENTRIC THEORIES
Worldview/ Cultural Framework	African Worldview	European Worldview
Motivation/Psychic Energy	Proactive - Positive Energy Assumption	Reactive - Negative Energy Assumption
Standard of Referent	Strengths, Normality, Naturalness/Positive- adaptiveness of behavior & functioning	Weakness, Abnormality, Defensiveness in behavior & functioning
Subtypes or Variants	Africentric (African Worldview emphasis)	a. Pure Eurocentric (European Worldview emphasis) b. Pseudo Africentric (Diffuse/Predominant EWV emphasis) c. Transitional Africentric (movement toward AWW emphasis)
Goal/Outcome	Africentric Orientation	1) Eurocentric Orientation 2) Transracial/Diffuse: Universalism emphasis 3) Some Pro-Black with Diversity & Universalism emphasis
Optimal Functioning	Fulfilling the African Survival Thrust	Fulfilling the European Survival Thrust

Adapted from Kambon, 1998.

A. Eurocentric and Pseudo-Africentric Models

Following Kambon's (1992, 1998) earlier scheme, theories whose racial-ethnic and philosophical orientation is of European/European-American descent and thus asserts the European Worldview (EWV)-cultural reality are classified as "Pure Eurocentric" because of its Caucasian authorship and exclusive emphasis on the EWV as the conceptual framework (i.e., the absence of the African Worldview). And in a related vein, we define the Pseudo-Africentric Models as those theories whose ethnic- philosophical orientation is of AA descent, yet asserts the European Worldview-cultural reality as the conceptual framework of analysis (Kambon, 1992, 1998).

In the case of the *Pure Eurocentric Approach*, it, of course, has represented one of the oldest traditions in Eurocentric social sciences concerned with such theoretical formulations of AA personality (Kambon, 2006). These theories therefore are distinguished philosophically and ideologically from other approaches by their imposition of the European Worldview (being their natural cultural orientation) as the appropriate conceptual framework for explaining AA personality or some important aspects of it. While no independent models in the Eurocentric tradition have ever been proposed as a definitive model of African American personality (Kambon, 1998, 2006; Thomas & Sillen, 1972), a variety of seemingly highly eclectic theoretical perspectives derived from Eurocentric speculations and stereotypes about Blacks drawing from psychological, bio-physiological and medical, sociological and anthropological knowledge bases (Ferguson, 1916; Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Pettigrew, 1964), came to represent a kind of general-eclectic paradigm. This paradigm, as articulated by Kambon (1998), posits a generally negative psychological picture forming the AA personality profile. The negative constructs of AA self-hatred, low or exaggeratedly high self-esteem, negative reference group identification, low intelligence and low-achievement motivation, low frustration-stress tolerance (inability to delay gratification) and faulty coping skills, high anger, aggression and hostility, anti-social and criminally bent behaviors, low sense of personal causation/fate-control (high externality), among many others, have all been articulated either separately or in combinations as the core content emphasis of such theories (Dreger & Miller, 1968, 1972; Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2006; Pettigrew, 1964; Thomas & Sillen, 1972).

The *Pseudo-Africentric Models*, on the other hand, represent those theories of AA personality developed by AAs and others of African descent (Fanon, 1967) who manifest a seemingly unwitting allegiance to the basic paradigms of Eurocentric Psychology and behavioral science as their basis for interpreting the self-concept, identity and motivation of Black people (Azibo, 1990; Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2006). This group has been led in large part by such notables as Kenneth B. Clark (1965), Frantz Fanon (1967), Alvin Poussaint (1972), James Comer (Comer & Poussaint, 1982, 1995), William Cross' (1971, 1991) earlier works on Black racial identity, Janet Helms (1985), and a host of others (Azibo, 1990; Kambon, 1998, 2006). This paradigm, as articulated by Kambon (1992, 1998), also posits a generally negative cultural-psychological picture of the AA personality profile.

For example, they fail by and large to address *African cultural reality* as a positive presence (*protective factor*) in the psychology of AAs. Rather, they accept the monolithic cultural paradigm of Eurocentric psychology and thus see AA personality as driven by the same Eurocentric motivational forces as White Americans, such as achievement driven, individualism, materialism and power-dominance driven, assertiveness-aggression as optimal motivation, along with an emphasis on differences, competitiveness, violence, victory-driven, conflict, strife, anxiety avoidance, shame and guilt all as critical psychological elements in normal personality operation (Azibo, 1990; Kambon, 1992, 1998). As a result, such theories assert great emphasis on attempting to explain negative constructs of African American personality like self-hatred, low or exaggeratedly high self-esteem, negative reference group identification, low intelligence performance and low-achievement motivation, low frustration-stress tolerance (inability to delay gratification) and faulty coping skills, high anger, aggression and hostility, anti-social and criminally bent behaviors, low sense of personal causation/fate-control (high externality), etc. (Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2006).

1. Common Theoretical Components of Eurocentric and Pseudo-Africentric Models

Some of the major emphasis and key constructs articulated in this approach are the following:

Core Elements/Factors/Psychological Infrastructure (Structural and Motivation-Functional Emphasis): Chief among the Core factors emphasized in the Eurocentric models are Negative racial identity (Negative Personal and Reference Group -racial/ethnic- identity) - Black self-hatred, Envy of Whites/White Preference, low self-esteem and/or exaggerated (compensatory) high self-esteem, and a host of other anti-Black values and beliefs, and pathology-leaning psychological and emotional traits.

Peripheral Elements/Factors (Attitudinal and behavior patterns resulting from response to oppression or European American cultural reality forces): The Peripheral factors, or those behavioral factors presumably generated by or emanating from the Core factors, represent a composite theme of “Anti-Black” attitudes and behaviors among other dysfunctional-maladaptive, anti-social and ineffective behaviors.

Psychological Dynamics: The primary motivational emphasis associated with these theories stress psychodynamics reflecting a psychological dissonance over negative racial identity/status (negative social status) in American society. It emphasizes tension reduction/being driven toward achieving emotional-psychological comfort with self-identity (personal identity) by rejecting Black racial-cultural identity (reference group) and by identifying with/adopting White Identity, or at least a *Non-Racial/Universal* – Human Identity, as normal-natural African American identity/personality (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951; Penn, Gaines & Phillips, 1993; Thomas & Sillen, 1972).

Developmental Issues: The primary developmental emphasis of these models has focused on psychologically transitioning from an Anti-Black to *Non-Black* – racially neutral or Universal - Human identity. Other constructs like Individualism/Individual Human Identity (achieving an Individual identity independent of race and culture) have been emphasized and are generally thrust toward the need to transcend racial identity to achieve an optimal individual-personal human identity within the framework of European/European American cultural reality.

Outcome Emphasis: Optimal African American personality development and functioning, according to these models, is viewed as synonymous to achieving a personal identity indistinguishable from normative (if not “optimal”) European/European American personality. The individual level adaptation/internalization of a European American racial-cultural identity-self-concept, as opposed to a Black/African-centered racial-cultural identity/self-concept, etc., is emphasized as the desired outcome-expression of normal African American personality development (Kambon, 1992, 1998).

Empirical Predictions and Assessment Based on Pure Eurocentric Models:

As has been noted elsewhere (Kambon, 1998), these theories have virtually made a living off of the infamous “Black self-hatred” research model known rather generally as the *racial preference* and various *racial comparative research* literature spanning the mid-1930s through 1970s (Kambon, 1998, 2006). In general, the Eurocentric approach and its various constructs have predicted a myriad of behavioral anomalies and negative mental health outcomes among AAs, many of which were alluded to earlier. This list encompasses such notorious findings as identity confusion and negative personal and reference group identities, negative racial group perception and stereotyping among AAs; also lower self-esteem and negative self-concept among AAs compared to Caucasian Americans, both children and adults, lower intelligence/mental capacity/capabilities compared to Caucasians, white skin preference expressed in a variety of ways, lower achievement aspirations and less competitiveness than Whites, more criminally-prone (higher arrest and incarceration rates) than Whites, lower high school graduation rates, lower college enrollment and graduation rates and higher unemployment rates than Whites, higher truancy and school drop-out rates, delinquency, teenage parenting, and so on and so forth (Farley, 2002). Of course a proliferation of culturally biased research instruments and questionable methodologies have been developed and utilized in this overall effort, and a notorious collection of contestable findings, including those listed, have been presented (Kambon, 1998).

B. Pseudo-Africentric and Transitional Models

The second group of theories, the *Transitional Models*, are to a large extent a derivation of the “Pseudo-Africentric or Diffuse approaches.” As noted, they represent those theories under African/AA authorship that superimpose the *European worldview as the conceptual framework, even though they focus on explaining AA personality* or some important aspects of it. These theories have represented the oldest tradition among Black psychological and social science theorists in the general field of Black or Africana Studies, from the early works of Martin Delany (1856), W. E. B. DuBois (1902) and others of their era, to the more contemporary psychological works of Herman G. Canady in his 1946 manuscript entitled “The Psychology of the Negro” (Guthrie, 1998) and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1965), and the current studies of William Cross, Jr. (1991, 1995) and his associates (Cross, Parham & Helms, 1998; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Azibo (1990) has observed that while some of these theories emphasize a predominance of negative traits as the basis of portraying, characterizing and explaining normal and natural AA personality, others emphasize more positive and perhaps more surface-transient psychological traits/states, dispositions and behavioral patterns all defined within the European-American cultural context of experience. These models pay little or no attention to the role/forces of traditional African cultural reality and philosophy (values, beliefs, behavioral norms, etc.) in driving AA cultural reality in the contemporary psychosocial dynamics of AA personality (Kambon, 1992, 1998). Rather, they emphasize coping with and adapting to the European-American cultural reality as the sole determinant of core AA personality functioning in terms of racial identity and perhaps an African American personal-social identity void of any substantive African “cultural” infrastructure-underpinnings. Their motivational emphasis is therefore focused on “reactivity” to the forces of European American socio-cultural reality and the coping and assimilation demands it places on African American’s adaptive responses. Although this area of theory in relatively recent times has been dominated mainly by William Cross’ (1971, 1991, 1995) ideas about AA personality, other theorists like Charles Thomas (1971), and Ivory Toldson and Alfred Pastuer (1976; Pastuer & Toldson, 1982), among others (Myers, 1993; Myers, et al., 1991; Myers, et al., 1996; Sellers et al., 1997) have also contributed to the general Transitional paradigm. While some of these approaches do recognize and give some limited emphasis to traditional African philosophy and culture in contemporary AA personality, at least as a conceptual starting point (Myers, 1985, 1993; Pastuer and Toldson, 1982; White & Parham, 1990), they nevertheless emphasize reaction and adaptation to an European American cultural reality, or, in some instances, adopting a more multi-cultural and universalistic philosophy (in interpreting Traditional African philosophy) as forming the basic psychological core of AA personality dynamics and functioning.

In general, these theories in many respects seem to place a predominate emphasis on the DuBois (1902) theme of “Bi-culturalism,” in the sense of racial and social status conflicts among Black individuals, and perhaps Fanon’s (1967) complex theme of *Existential Universalism* (Bulhan, 1985; Kambon, 1998), rather than on African cultural infrastructure as forming the psychological core of AA personality (Kambon, 1992).

1. Common Theoretical Components

Among the major emphasis and key constructs articulated in this approach are the following:

Core Elements/Factors/Psychological Infrastructure: Racial/Ethnic Identity at both the Personal identity and Reference Group identity levels (i.e., positive or negative Personal identity versus positive or negative Reference Group/Racial identity) seems to represent the core emphasis in these theories. The idea of multiple identities encompassing individual uniqueness void of race or social emphasis, racial identity with all of the usual racial content emphasis, as well as other social identities then are seen as forming the core factors of AA personality (Sellers et al., 1997).

Peripheral Elements/Factors: The Peripheral factors emphasized in these models represent those behavior patterns resulting from the “Response to Oppression” or European American cultural reality/forces, most of which are negative, maladaptive, or are Eurocentric culturally slanted (representing assimilationist and bi-cultural identities).

Dynamics/Functional Aspects: The primary motivational emphasis associated with these theories represents a kind of psychological dissonance over racial identity conflicts (negative social status in American society). It emphasizes tension reduction-driven functioning focused on achieving emotional/psychological comfort between personal/self-identity as Bi-cultural/Multi-cultural and Reference Group identity.

Developmental Issues: The primary developmental emphasis of this approach has focused on a normal progression of psychological transitioning from anti-Black to pro-Black to Multi-cultural Identity, or a broadly applied “Human Identity,” or an all-inclusive “Universal Cultural/Human Identity.”

Outcome Emphasis: Optimal AA personality development and functioning is generally viewed in its final form to represent a *race neutral* or *transracial/transethnic/transcultural* human identity (or a “universal human identity”), often comprising a mixture of individualism with strong existential aspects, along with a strong achievement orientation and a “healthy” altruistic emphasis in one’s behavior, suggesting the ultimate achievement of self-acceptance/self-satisfaction or psychological comfort with oneself as a human being in a community of other human/universal beings.

2. William Cross' Theory of Nigrescence

As noted, the most well-known and fully developed of the various models comprising this group is the theory of "Nigrescence" proposed by William E. Cross, Jr., and his associates (Cross, 1989, 1991, 1995; Cross, Strauss and Fhaghan-Smith, 1999; Cross & Valdiver, 2001; Helms, 1989; Parham, 1989). Succinctly, in its original formulation, Cross' theory (Cross, 1971, 1989) proposes that AA personality is a dynamic psychological/cognitive-emotional process of systematic stages and/or phases consisting of some five presumably distinct cognitive-emotional (attitudinal) states in transition from an Anti-Blackness and Pro-White orientation to a conscious multi-cultural/pro-diversity/"transracial"/inclusively humanistic orientation at its mature-optimal level of expression. The five stages are identified as (1) *Pre-Encounter Stage* (Anti-Blackness/Pro-Whiteness orientation), (2) *Encounter Stage* (a purely transitioning process moving away from the Pre-Encounter state provoked by contradicting experience), (3) *Immersion-Emersion Stage* (immersing into a pro-Blackness/anti-Whiteness orientation followed by contradicting experiences provoking an emersion to a more balanced pro-Blackness/pro-Whiteness orientation), and (4) *Internalization Stage* (reflecting a post-race nationalism or racially transcendent orientation - an appreciation of diversity/multi-culturalism and Global-Third World sensitivity. A fifth stage is possible by transforming the new psychological orientation of Stage 4 into social action on behalf of all people, regardless of race. Stage 4 is the more common level reached by most people who successfully negotiate the Nigrescence process, and thus represents *optimal Black personality* for the average AA (Cross, 1971, 1978, 1991, 1995).

It is noteworthy that Cross' basic model has enjoyed wide appeal for almost two decades before any meaningful attempts at modification were put forth. Its broad appeal was no doubt derived in part from it being widely viewed as best capturing the psycho-social dynamics of the African American racial consciousness movement from the pre-1960s Jim Crow era - through the 1960s "Black Power" movement, to the post-60s Racial Integration era (Kambon, 1998). A part of its strong appeal also no doubt derived from it representing for almost a decade the only fairly well developed model with at least what appeared to be some positive features about Blacks that had been put forth by an African American psychological theorist along with its direct appeal to the popular conception of Black identity formation (as a "Bi-cultural" phenomenon).

Revisions and Extensions of Cross' Model

During the mid 1980s, Thomas Parham (1985, 1989) and Janice Helms (1989) proposed expansions of the basic model. Parham emphasized the recycling of Nigrescence throughout the individual lifecycle from around mid-adolescence (Cross et al., 1999). Helms, on the other hand, emphasized the important motivational role of social interaction forces (Interactive Themes) characterizing different periods of life undergirding Nigrescence, such as Cognitive Dissonance-Consistency motivation and Transitional Cognitive States, as significant additions in articulating (interpreting-explaining) the Nigrescence process. Parham and Helms (1981, 1985) also developed the RIAS-B as one of the earliest instruments designed to empirically assess the Nigrescence Model (Burlew & Smith, 1991). Although this instrument has received mixed success as a valid and reliable assessment of the model, it also has seemed to raise more questions about the theoretical clarity and logical consistency within the original model (Akbar, 1989; Cross, 1991; Kambon, 1998; Kambon & Hopkins, 1993; Nobles, 1989) as it did in demonstrating the predictive efficacy of the Nigrescence paradigm.

In his subsequent revisions of the model, Cross (1991, 1995) emphasized the importance of drawing a clear distinction between Personal Identity (PI) and Racial Group Orientation (RGO) in relation to the Black Self-Concept within the framework of the Nigrescence Model. PI refers to an individual's sense of personal uniqueness, whereas RGO refers to one's attitude and values associated with her/his social group affiliation and preference. A person can have many RGOs, such as race, gender, religion, etc. Thus, Cross argues that one's RGO has little to no relationship to their PI because their PI does not have to take RGO into consideration whatsoever. Cross also dropped the Fifth stage (Internalization Commitment Stage) in the revised Nigrescence Model (Cross, 1991, 1995; Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

More recent revisions of the model have resulted from the development of the *Cross Racial Identity Scale* (CRIS) and the extensive and rigorous psychometric analysis it has undergone (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), led primarily by his chief collaborator Beverly Vandiver (2001). Their work has resulted in further revisions in the Nigrescence paradigm, mainly in terms of a revamping of the stages as "states/traits of AA personality" – racial/ethnic identity-consciousness. The Pre-Encounter Stage has been revamped into *three* distinct states; the Emersion Stage remains relatively unchanged as a transitional process; the Immersion-Emersion stage expanded into *two* distinct (yet related) states; and the Internalization Stage has been revised into *three* distinct states, making a total of *nine* states/traits of Nigrescence (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). The revised states/traits are as follows:

Cross' Revised Nigrescence Model

1) *Pre-Encounter (PE) States/Traits*

- 1a. PE Assimilation State – Emphasis on pursuit of American-cultural identity
- 1b. PE Miseducation State – Emphasis on internalization of Eurocentric stereotypes about Blacks (RGO)
- 1c. PE Self-Hatred State – Internalized White supremacy or Anti-Blackness at personal level (PI)

2) *The Encounter Stage*

The process of reexamining one's RGO – It is not a State/Trait (Attitude) as are the others.

3) *Immersion-Emersion (IE) States/Traits*

- 3a. IE Anti-White State – (Intense anti-Whiteness/anti-White hostility)
- 3b. IE Black Nationalism State - (Intense Black Involvement)

4) *Internalization (I) States/Traits*

- 4a. I-*Afrocentrism* (Black Self-Determination emphasis, more other-exclusive)
- 4b. I-*Multicultural Inclusive* (Humanistic-Universalist/totally inclusive - give equal emphasis to others)
- 4c. I-*Multicultural Racial* (Black Core Emphasis but diversity inclusive - (Bi-culturalist))

All have in common the “pro-Black” element, according to Cross et al., but shift in terms of other racial-ethnic exclusiveness-inclusiveness.

As shown, while the revised model consists of all of the states from the original, they have all been recast, except for the Encounter Stage, as more or less distinct Psychological Orientations/states or traits (as opposed to stages) of Black personality/Identity. Even with these additions, however, the basic core of the theory remains unchanged (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Kambon, 1998; Vandiver et al., 2002).

This observation notwithstanding, it is noteworthy nevertheless to recognize that philosophically, the revised model allows for the existence of a “Pro-Black” (Black self-affirming/ self-determining) psychological orientation (i.e., the Afrocentrism State/Trait) as an optimal Black mentally healthy state without the involvement of a *Non-Black* emphasis, and thus as sufficient for healthy psychological functioning or Black identity expression (Akbar, 1989; Kambon & Hopkins, 1993). This aspect alone seems to shift (or rehabilitate) the Nigrescence model in our view from a strict “Pseudo-Africentric” approach, as it was initially classified, (Kambon, 1992, 1998), to perhaps a more “Transitional Africentric” emphasis.

While the model still does not in the strictest sense address the worldview or cultural reality differences factor, which no doubt limits its Africentric value (Akbar, 1989; Kambon, 1998; Nobles, 1989), this apparent philosophical shift seems to open up the conceptual possibility of an alternative reality referent for valuating AA psychological functioning and behavior to that of the dominant/mainstream Eurocentric American reality (Kambon, 1998, 2004, 2006).

Empirical Predictions and Assessment Based on Cross' Model:

It has been in the area of empirical assessment of the predictions of Cross' Nigrescence model that it has undergone most of its contemporary activity driving the more recent revisions - expansions. Heuristically speaking, the core predictions emanating from Cross' model suggest that contemporary AAs can be found to differ individually in their psychological states/orientations related to racial-identity/consciousness along the 8-9 dimensions/states or traits of the Nigrescence process, and certain racially-focused behaviors should be predictable from (correlated with) them. Led by the extensive psychometric work of Vandiver (2001) in particular, recent findings have prompted many of the latest revisions and expansions of Cross' model. Most of this research has been associated with the development and testing of the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) that was developed by Cross, Vandiver and colleagues (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver et al., 2002). The main findings to date have been that: (1) The CRIS has been shown to constitute a multifaceted assessment instrument; (2) it has good reliability and construct validity (convergent, divergent and discriminant validity) for the most part, and its findings to date, at least for 6 of the 8-9 Nigrescence traits, appear to be theoretically consistent. There does, however, appear to be some conceptual and empirical issues related to the formulation of the Immersion-Emersion, Intense Black Involvement (Black Nationalism) and Internalization Multicultural Racial orientation subscales of the CRIS (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). This research is ongoing, and appears to be looking at the broader application of the paradigm to contemporary African American psychological functioning and behaviors (Holler, 2005; Vandiver et al., 2002).

C. Africentric Models

The last group of theories, called the Africentric Models, represent those theories under African/AA authorship, that utilize the African worldview as the conceptual framework for portraying, characterizing and explaining AA personality or some important aspects of it. They utilize traditional African philosophical-cultural values, beliefs and behavioral norms for formulating/constructing the psychological traits, dispositions and behavioral patterns that are used to represent normal and natural AA personality as distinguished from maladaptive, abnormal and dysfunctional AA personality (Kambon, 1998; Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2009).

These theories represent the most recent-contemporary approach, even though the basic ideas are quite old in the thinking of African-descent scholars, both in Africa as well as throughout the Diaspora (Akbar, 2004; Bynum, 1999; Kambon, 1992, 1998; Nobles, 2006; Oshodi, 2004). While Wade Nobles' (2006) early and seminal work on the continuing influence of traditional African philosophy and cultural reality in the behavior and basic functioning of Africans throughout the Diaspora had some influence on the development of Africentric theories of AA personality (Kambon, 1998), paradigms constructed by Na'im Akbar (1975, 1976, 1979, 2004), Robert Williams (1981), and Kobi Kambon (1992, 1998, 2003, 2006) in particular represent the more fully developed models to emerge in this literature. These models, while both similar and different in some important respects, seem to combine a structural, dynamic and functional emphasis framed on the African cultural reality within the American socio-cultural context. Some of their overlapping emphases are as follows:

(a) emphasis on traditional African culture in terms of values, beliefs and behavioral practices that have persisted in the AA psychological makeup forming the psychological infrastructure core of normal-natural AA personality;

(b) emphasis on the structure, organization and dynamics of the core in thrusting AA behavior and functioning toward collective/cultural-affirming outcomes;

(c) emphasis on the psychosocial nature, dynamics and outcome of the interaction between this normal-natural African-centered thrust or striving and the European American cultural reality in which the historic and contemporary AA personality finds itself. These theories then clearly make a *positive* and *proactive* assumption about the basic energy driving the African/AA personality system in its interaction (conflict, adaptations to, and coping) with the imposing, ever-present and hostile European American cultural reality (Kambon, 1998, 2003; Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2009).

1. Common Theoretical Components

Core Elements/Factors/Psychological Infrastructure: In these theories, Racial-Cultural Identity (Personal and Reference Group Racial-Cultural Identity) is viewed as serving the core function of Racial-Cultural self-affirmation.

Peripheral Elements/Factors: The Peripheral factors that are emphasized in these theories focus on the Cultural Behavior/response patterns, individually and collectively, that operate in adapting to one's environment as reflecting normal-natural AA Personality Traits – i.e., the Basic Traits of AA personality. Aberrations/Abnormality/Maladaptation in the basic traits modified by oppression (i.e., European American cultural reality) forces are also articulated at this level of the Africentric theories.

Dynamics/Functional Aspects: The psycho-dynamic aspects of AA personality in Africentric theories emphasize in one way or another the Natural (inherent) Racial-Cultural Self-Actualization/Affirmation/Empowerment striving (i.e., the proactive thrust or striving) inherent in normal/healthy AA personality functioning.

Developmental Issues: Where psychological development is concerned, Africentric theories seem to emphasize the critical importance of ongoing psychological (inclusive of spirituality) growth/development/transformations toward a mature and fuller expression of Africanity throughout the lifecycle of the individual. The vital role and function of African-centered socialization occurring in African-centered institutions and the specific socio-cultural infrastructure of African-centered societal-cultural institutions are emphasized as essential to the normal-natural developmental process of AA personality. Thus, there is a general emphasis in these theories on the processes involved in transitioning (cognitive and behavioral transitioning) from lower/weaker to higher/stronger levels (and expressions) of Conscious Africanity over systematic stages or transitioning phases of development covering the entire life cycle.

Outcome Emphasis: Optimal AA personality development and functioning in the African-Centered theories emphasizes a congruent pattern of Africentric psychological dispositions (i.e., a core nexus of pro-Black/African values, beliefs and attitudes) and behaviors reflecting the normal-natural *African Survival Thrust* of the AA personality system.

2. Kobi K. Kambon's Theory as Representative

Although the works of Na'im Akbar (1975, 1976, 1979; 2004) and Robert Williams (1981; Kambon, 2006) have made significant statements of their own in these areas, the most widely known and fully developed model representing this approach is that of Kobi Kambon (1992, 2003, 2006). Succinctly, Kambon's model emphasizes two key heuristic constructs in articulating the structure, dynamics, and behavioral outcomes related to a cultural-centered understanding of AA psycho-logical functioning and behavior: *African Self-Consciousness* (ASC) and *Cultural Misorientation* (CM). According to the model, African personality consists of a core system called the African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO) and African Self-Consciousness (ASC), and a number of basic traits emanating from the core. *ASEO* is the foundation of the Black personality. It is the organizing principle and energy source of the entire system. It is innate (biogenetically based), unconscious, and operationally defined by the construct of "Spirituality" - a dynamic communal energy which allows the Self to merge (extend) into the totality of phenomenal experience. It is also immutable (unchanging in its thrust) and deeply rooted in the African psychical system. The ASEO manifests in terms of a set of basic psychological and behavioral traits, or "Africanisms," expressive of the African spirituality dynamic (Kambon, 1992). *ASC* derives from the ASEO and, except for its conscious nature and ideological content/thrust, is essentially an "undifferentiated process" from the ASEO under normal-natural conditions.

That is, a part of the ASEO differentiates into a conscious structure called ASC through developmental progression under normal-natural conditions. ASC is therefore partly biogenetic, but because consciousness evolves in large part through experience, it is also partly environmental-experientially based as well. ASC directs and guides the personality system toward Africentric goals and objectives; that is, it directs/focuses the “African Survival Thrust” inherent in the ASEO. Thus, the ASEO defines and energizes the African personality system, while ASC cognitively directs or focuses the system toward the fulfillment and maintenance of African survival, affirmation-empowerment (Kambon, 1992).

The ASC Model

The ASC core is defined operationally by four basic components or competencies (cognitive-attitudinal and behavioral competencies). They are as follows:

- a. Awareness-recognition of one's collective African identity.
- b. Priority value placed on African survival, racial-cultural self-knowledge and positive development.
- c. Participation in African cultural institutions and their perpetuation.
- d. Practice of resolute resistance against all “anti-African” forces.

Combined, these competencies define the self-affirming, self-determining and self-fortification thrust of the AA personality’s basic striving for collective self-empowerment.

We can see then that given the ASC’s core more basic dependence on experiential development (environmental forces), it is susceptible to change/modification under certain socio-cultural conditions. Thus, the directional thrust and strength of ASC can vary radically from its natural tendency under certain *unnatural-abnormal* experiential conditions. For example, variability in the actual strength of the manifestation of ASC (in terms of intensity and pervasiveness or dominance) is explained in terms of experiential variability among individual Blacks (different racial-cultural psycho-histories, and especially concentrated, long-term developmental Eurocentric experiences). The strength of ASC then depends on the extent to which early socialization experiences and/or significant institutional processes actively nurture and reinforce it (Kambon, 1992, 2003). In a heterogeneous racial-cultural context where African-centered forces are not dominant (i.e., where an “alien/European worldview” dominates the socio-cultural reality of AAs), the natural socialization processes undergirding ASC may be weakened and distorted (Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2003).

On the other hand, a strengthening-reinforcing effect would be expected in a homogeneous (natural) racial-cultural context where African-centered socio-cultural forces are more dominant (Kambon, 1992). Of course, a variety of psychological modifications and/or indoctrinating circumstances of an institutional nature may also interact with and, in some cases, override ambiguous individual socialization conditions where racial-cultural identity can be blurred or de-emphasized, such as in a racially integrated social context where a mixture of some African-centered and some European-centered socialization experiences occur (Kambon, 2003).

Hence, ASC can function at different intensities/levels (from Weak to Strong ASC), depending on the dominant socio-cultural, institutional experiences characterizing the developmental context of a young AA personality. Moderate-to-Strong ASC thus represents movement toward the optimal pole of the African mental health continuum more so than does the condition of Weak ASC, and particularly *Severely Weak ASC* (Kambon, 1992, 2003).

Hence, there are many circumstances that can interfere with or distort normal Black personality functioning in terms of the strength of ASC. These circumstances, where they do occur, are usually socio-cultural in nature and typically involve the operation of institutionalized anti-African forces, as in *cultural oppression* (Kambon, 1998, 2003, 2006). In the *unnatural* socio-culturally oppressive context of American society, where ASC is superimposed upon by an alien and anti-African reality structure, it (ASC) is subject to severe weakening, modification or distortion from the overriding influence of the alien/anti-African European worldview (Kambon, 2002, 2003, 2006).

The CM Model

Kambon's model further proposes that the severe weakening of ASC constitutes (in many instances) the onset of a basic disorder in the AA personality that is called *Cultural Misorientation/CM* (Kambon, 2003). The CM model thus proposes that chronic and severely weakened ASC can under some circumstances bring about a shift in the core psychological orientation of AA personality, prompting a process of transitioning (in content) from degraded African worldview content to the adopting/internalization of European worldview content. In such an instance, severely degraded ASC qualities (such as a weak African worldview identification) are no longer adequate, appropriate and applicable to describe and explain the psychodynamic condition of the AA personality. The psychological parameters of CM thus become necessary as the more appropriate interpretative framework under these circumstances for describing and explaining the transformation in the AA personality. Hence, the occurrence of chronic-severely weakened ASC represents the psychological crossroads whereby the AA personality undergoes its paradoxical transition from an African-centered to a European-centered *survival thrust or cultural reality framework* in its core conscious level functioning (or from an ASC to a CM psychodynamic). *The model thus proposes that only under the severely weakened ASC condition do the psychological preconditions come about for the transitioning from ASC dominance to CM dominance to occur.*

Kambon therefore defines *Cultural Misorientation (CM)* as a psychological orientation in AAs resulting from European cultural oppression reflecting a European Survival Thrust, reflecting the basic components or content dimensions of a materialistic, individualistic, alien and anti-self, self-destructive and racial integration emphasis in one's thoughts, attitudes and behaviors (Kambon, 2003, pp. 72-73).

These six components of CM are described as follows:

Materialism Orientation: reflects a physical-material objectification emphasis in life (emphasis on physical characteristics, clothes, money, things, etc).

Individualism Orientation: reflects an I/Me emphasis in life.

Alien-Self Orientation: reflects a general Eurocentric values emphasis in one's self-concept and general approach to life.

Anti-Self Orientation: reflects the Alien-Self emphasis along with negativity and hostility toward Blackness/Africanity.

Self-Destructive Orientation: reflects an emphasis on self-group injurious and anti-social and/or criminal thoughts and behaviors.

Integration Orientation: reflects a dominant emphasis on the inclusion/involvement of non-Blacks (namely Whites) in one's life.

CM, according to Kambon (2003), thus represents a Eurocentric - "Anti-African" self-consciousness among AAs which *the European American societal-worldview context* (i.e., American cultural institutions) *allows to masquerade as a normal-natural (mentally healthy)* and functionally effective *psychological-cultural orientation among AAs* as a consequence of institutional reinforcement (i.e. socialization, assimilation and societal indoctrination processes). In other words, CM content is consistent with, and thereby supported and reinforced by European American culture itself (Kambon, 1998, 2003).

The CM Model further proposes some three levels of intensity –severity - that can range from a *minimal* degree of the disorder to a *moderate* degree, to a *severe* degree of the disorder. *Minimal CM* represents the weakest level of identification with or internalization of the European Worldview of the three levels, while *Moderate CM* represents a much stronger Eurocentric consciousness than the minimal CM level, but less than the severe CM level, and *Severe CM* reflects the strongest and most pervasive European self-consciousness, i.e., an overwhelming predominance of internalized Eurocentric/anti-African cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, of the three levels (Kambon, 2003).

As indicated earlier, within the psychosocial context of cultural oppression, the acquisition of CM can follow a developmental pattern similar to ASC, only emphasizing the opposite cultural (Eurocentric over Africentric) content. Thus, depending on the levels of Eurocentric emphasis/exposure, the resulting CM condition can reflect from minimal to severe CM levels (Kambon, 2003).

The ASC and CM Prediction Models

Kambon's (1992, 2003) models also propose a systematic set of propositions related to both ASC and CM. The focus of these propositions, where ASC is concerned, emphasize psychological correlates of ASC that involve general psychological dispositions (self-esteem, personal causation, achievement motivation, etc.), behavioral predictions of ASC that involve self-affirming (pro-Black) behaviors and opposition to anti-African/anti-Black forces, as well as background predictors of ASC indicative of Africentric socialization experiences (Kambon, 1992). On the other hand, the opposite predictions, for the most part, emanate from the CM Construct. In this case, the focus of the propositions suggest that *positive relationships* would be expected to occur between CM and such psychological functions and behaviors as poor or sub-optimal mental health states like low self-esteem, apathy, low motivation, high anxiety, low stress tolerance, problems in anger control, etc., and such Eurocentric measures of psychological disorder/mental illness like depression, psychosomatic disorders, schizophrenia and psychopathic states, paranoia, etc. (Kambon, 2003; Kambon and Rackley, 2005). Some Eurocentric measures of psychological health/positive-optimal mental health within the European worldview context would also be expected to correlate positively with CM, such as an internal locus of control orientation, high need for achievement, competitiveness and aggressiveness. Positive correlations may also be expected between CM and other *African-centered measures* of personality disorders or poor AA mental health (Kambon, 1998, 2003), such as anti-Black attitudes and behaviors, pro-White attitudes and behaviors, and measures of racial neutrality or a so-called humanistic orientation. At the same time, however, *negative relationships* would be expected to occur between CM and such psychological functions and behaviors as African-centered measures of healthy/optimal personality such as ASC and an African worldview orientation and pro-Black attitudes and behaviors (Kambon, 2003; Kambon and Rackley, 2005). Accordingly, a psychologically healthy AA, as noted earlier, manifests *conscious* functioning and behavior reflective of the affirmation and perpetuation of an *African/AA Survival Thrust* (Kambon, 1992, 1998).

Again, African Self-Consciousness is reflective of *healthy* AA personality in Kambon's model while Cultural Misorientation is reflective of *unhealthy* AA personality or personality disorder (Kambon, 1992, 2003). Hence, the ASC and CM constructs represent those aspects of the AA personality system that have good heuristic value, and thus assessed through systematic empirical examination (Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2003). The assessment of ASC and CM is therefore critical, according to Kambon (1992, 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005), to a substantive and comprehensive evaluation of contemporary AA behavior and mental health.

In order to assess the ASC and CM Constructs, the *African Self-Consciousness Scale* (ASCS) and the *Cultural Misorientation Scale* (CMS), respectively, were developed by Kambon and his associates (see Kambon, 1992, 1996, 2003, 2005). The ASCS and CMS have been utilized in various research studies involving variables such as personal causation (Kambon, 1992), psychological well-being (Pierre and Mahalik, 2005), health promoting behaviors (Thompson and Chambers, 2000), anti-Black behavior (Kambon, 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005), career decision making (McCowan and Alston, 1998), and male-female relationships (Bell, Bouie and Baldwin, 1990), among others (Kambon, 1992, 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005, in press).

Empirical Assessment Based on Kambon's Model

Empirical research has been conducted on Kambon's model utilizing the ASCS since the early 1980s (Kambon, 1992, 1998). From these findings: 1) the ASCS has been shown to be a valid and reliable multi-factored measure of the ASC Construct; 2) its four empirical factors are consistent with its four conceptual factors; ASCS-F1: *Sense of Collective African Identity and Self-Fortification*, ASCS-F2: *Resistance/Defense against anti-African Forces*, ASCS-F3: *Value for Africentric Institutions and Cultural Expressions*, and ASCS-F4: *Value for African Culture*; 3) it has been shown to be a reliable predictor of both general psychological health factors (self-esteem, sense of personal causation, etc.) and African-centered psychological health factors and behavior (pro-Black functioning) across diverse demographics of African-descent populations; and 4) it has also been shown to be associated with certain background profiles, as well as demonstrate some effective use in the assessment of clinical interventions with both individuals and groups of adult AAs (Kambon, 1992, 1998, 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005, in progress).

The CMS, on the other hand, has enjoyed a much shorter period of research activity given its briefer history (Kambon, 1997; 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005). Since its development in the mid-1990s (Kambon, 1997), the CMS has been shown to represent a valid and reliable multi-factored measure of the CM Construct (Kambon, 2003; Kambon & Rackley, 2005; Kwate, 2001) across diverse African-descent demographic profiles. It has also been shown to be a reliable predictor of general maladaptive and psychologically disordered functioning (depression, anti-social drug use, violence), as well as more cultural specific based maladaptive behaviors, such as *N-word* usage, light skin preference, preference for anti-Black rap music, etc., among young adult African-Americans in diverse social settings. This research is also ongoing and shows great promise toward bringing more clarity to the psychological analysis of AA behavior and mental health.

Conclusions

In concluding this brief review, several key questions beg for consideration in projecting the future status of this vital area of psychological theory and research. What future issues and concerns will we be confronted as this area of focus continues to unfold and expand its conceptual and contextual boundaries? One apparent critical issue appears to be the need for our models to accommodate more of the variety of developmental and socialization circumstances that the contemporary AA personality might experience (e.g., predominantly Black versus predominantly White or racially-culturally integrated, or Africentric versus Eurocentric worldview dominated socialization, or bi-racialism, etc.). There seems to be a continual need to call for a greater emphasis on *the role of cultural reality forces in forming the conceptual framework and content of our theories*, and the importance of including in some systematic ways the widest possible diversity in the sample populations that we study in our investigations. We also welcome the addition of more creative and innovative methodologies and instrumentation in our investigations, as well as encourage the development of both *molar* (Kambon, 1992, 2003) and *molecular* (Sellers et al., 1997) models in these explorations of the AA personality.

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