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**What is This?**
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Marcia Elizabeth Sutherland

Abstract

Although the Americas and Caribbean region are purported to comprise different ethnic groups, this article’s focus is on people of African descent, who represent the largest ethnic group in many countries. The emphasis on people of African descent is related to their family structure, ethnic identity, cultural, psychohistorical, and contemporary psychosocial realities. This article discusses the limitations of Western psychology for theory, research, and applied work on people of African descent in the Americas and Caribbean region. In view of the adaptations that some people of African descent have made to slavery, colonialism, and more contemporary forms of cultural intrusions, it is argued that when necessary, notwithstanding Western psychology’s limitations, Caribbean psychologists should reconstruct mainstream psychology to address the psychological needs of these Caribbean people. The relationship between theory and psychological interventions for the optimal development of people of African descent is emphasized throughout this article. In this regard, the African-centered and constructionist viewpoint is argued to be of utility in addressing the psychological growth and development of people of African descent living in the Americas and Caribbean region.

Keywords

Caribbean Psychology, African continuities, skin bleaching, constructionism

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It is patently clear that Western psychological theories and methods cannot adequately explain the social and psychological functioning of Caribbean peoples. Simply put, Western psychology is derived particularly from Greco-Roman philosophical and cultural underpinnings. Most psychological knowledge was developed in Europe and America. Western (mainstream) psychology has assimilated the norms and values of the Western social order, such as universalism (the establishment of universal laws that eliminate the influence of culture and context), individualism (the primacy of the individual versus the group), logical positivism (emphasis on empiricism, reductionism, and quantification), rationalism (the primacy of human reason versus feelings and intuitions), the Cartesian assumption of body-mind dualisms (assumptions that physical life and human consciousness are autonomous entities), nativistic concepts (the primacy of genotypes versus environmental influences), social Darwinism (the survival of the fittest), analytical knowledge, and prediction and control of behavior (Chiesa, 1998; Shields & Bhatia, 2009). “The natural sciences approach that emphasized strict adherence to experimental method, logical positivism, operationism, and the use of inferential statistics became entrenched in the discipline” (Kim, 1995, p. 664).

Western psychology was developed to explain the psychology of people of European descent. Indeed, people of African descent have largely been neglected in psychological research and, when studied, were negatively portrayed. Western psychologists have long-standing contemptuous and racist views of people of African descent (Richards, 1997).

It is also the case that Western psychology has routinely failed to adopt cultural pluralistic approaches in the study of different cultural groups. Instead, Western psychologists have promoted Eurocentric “universalistic” theories and race-comparative paradigms of human nature with White standards against which non-Europeans are judged (Diaz-Loving, Reyes-Lagunes, & Diaz-Guerrero, 1999). Essentially, Western psychology is the study of the individual organism unrelated to history, structure, culture, worldviews, and tradition. This approach is consistent with the Eurocentric biases, especially universalism and individualism, which permeate the discipline (Jones, 2004). Kim (1995) indicated that these Eurocentric values are readily evident when psychological theories and research methods are transported to different cultural contexts.

The limitation in using Euro-American psychological assumptions in studying Caribbean peoples is that the scholar is likely to commit transubstantive errors or “mistakes of meaning.” These occur when psychologists without critical analysis use cultural and psychological norms developed to explain a particular cultural group’s behavior to understand and explain the psychological functioning of a different cultural group (Nobles, 1989). Or as
Adair and Kagitecibasi (1995) wrote about Western psychology, “A culturally inappropriate discipline has been characterized as distorting interpretations of behavior, diverting attention from key social variables, and resulting in applied research orientations that do not match national social problems” (p. 634). Western psychology has also been characterized as male oriented, abstract, and general and has been defined as a discipline that seeks “ahistorical facts and truths, that is, relatively permanent, eternal characteristics of human psychological functioning (Sampson, 1978, p. 1338).

These Eurocentric biases are particularly problematic, as there are many cultural differences between Caribbean peoples and Westerners. Indeed, despite the enslavement experiences, colonialism, neocolonialism, and perpetual Western influences, there are Africanisms that distinguish African Caribbean populations from Westerners. Hence, an examination of the culture, philosophy, and language defining the Caribbean social reality and the cultural context in which Caribbean peoples live is appropriate. As discussed throughout this article, such explorations can contribute to the development of the discipline of Caribbean Psychology that can inform culturally appropriate theoretical frameworks and research approaches to address the important areas of human relations and geopolitical realities in the Caribbean region.

**African Continuities and Caribbean Psychology**

Several writers have described the historical and cultural linkages between African Caribbean peoples and Africa. In the late 1400s, Africans were first brought across the Atlantic Ocean to work on slave plantations in the Caribbean basin. Then and now, west African cosmologies (i.e., worldviews) and social theories have shaped the sociopsychological functioning of African Caribbean peoples (Barrow, 1996; Bewaji, 1997; Chevannes, 2000; Warner-Lewis, 1993).

African Caribbeans have traditionally embraced the extended family system, collectivism, and African humanism. Children were loved and the elderly were respected (Alleyne, 1996). It is important to underscore that kinship was the bedrock of African societies through all stages of human evolution: band, tribe, chiefdom and state. Africans embraced the kinship system because it allowed for better conflict resolution, it fostered stability and mutual aid, it promoted cooperation and social unity, and it protected the elderly, the impoverished, and orphans (Sutherland, 1997).

In contemporary Caribbean societies, pervasive interpersonal violence, child abuse, elder abuse, drug abuse, suicides, homicides, and the personal, familial, economic, and social consequences of these acts of violence have
preoccupied politicians and scholars. Several explanations exist for the high rates of psychosocial violence in Jamaica and in other English-speaking islands (Matthies, Meeks-Gardner, Daley, & Crawford-Brown, 2008). For the purposes of this article, the breakdown in the kinship system could be a useful variable that explains these acts of violence. For instance, as it relates to gang violence, previous research findings suggest that youths join gangs for acceptance, for a sense of belongingness, and to establish a sense of identity because these needs are not being satisfied in their families. It is well established that the family is the primary kinship group and socializing system for the establishment of a positive personal identity and for feelings of worthiness (Brody et al., 2004).

African retentions are evident in African Caribbeans’ stylistic modes of behaving. Alleyne (1996) discussed the norm of humility that made

African Jamaicans generally play down their achievements to avoid standing out from the community and alienating themselves from it. This reticence may flow from the belief that the natural and the supernatural worlds are closely linked and that the spirits or ancestral spirits of those you have offended will come to haunt you. (p. 159)

There is the Jamaican proverb on how God uses evil to humble the arrogant: “God -a-mighty know why ’im bruk fowl wing,” or “God Almighty knows why he broke the fowl’s wing” (McKenzie, 2005). In underscoring African continuities between African Caribbean people and continental Africans, it is interesting to note that according to Brian Morris (1994), it was also conventional for the Gusii of western Kenya to conceal from others any information about one’s advantages, fortunes, and positive events that would portray the self in favorable terms.

The African-derived religious beliefs and practices of Myalism, Obeah, Pocomania, Rastafarianism, Jamaican Revivalism, Santeria, Shango/Orisha, and Voodoo have been explored in a few studies (Maynard-Reid, 2000). Consistent with African conceptions of the human personality, African Caribbeans traditionally believe in the metaphysical nature of people. They believe in the “shadow” or “double” concept, the spiritual element of the person, which has agency (Hickling & James, 2008). Alleyne (1996) wrote that the Jamaican Obeahman

would catch the shadow and nail it or bury it beneath the silk cotton tree. The owner would then deteriorate rapidly and die if the shadow was not restored. The myalman’s function was to pull the shadow from
its imprisonment and ceremoniously restore it to the person in whom it once dwelled. (p. 86)

Similar conceptions of the shadow are found among the Lebou people of Senegal, the Akans of Ghana, and the Yoruba of Nigeria, among other continental Africans (Morris, 1994). Caribbean psychologists must vigorously challenge the stigmatization of these indigenous and African-derived religions (Hickling & James, 2008).

Africanized religious-spiritual values, beliefs, and practices must also inform theoretical frameworks and research approaches in the discipline of Caribbean Psychology, as there is a paucity of psychological research investigations on the importance of spirituality among African Caribbean in the Caribbean region (Gossai & Murrell, 2000; Zane, 1999). Similarly, the influence of the African worldviews on European-based and quasi-Christian groups needs to be explored (Taylor, Chatters, & Jackson, 2009). One prominent research area is the relationship between African Caribbean’s belief in spirit possession, obeah, or witchcraft and mental illness (Hickling & James, 2008). It is also essential to examine how religion and spirituality contribute to the transmission of values, beliefs, and norms and to behavior (Cohen, 2009).

Quite distinctive is the fact that western African languages provide the deep structures (i.e., syntax and semantics) of African Caribbean peoples’ indigenous languages, including patois and Papiamento (Rickford, 1999). Caribbean psychologists should consider addressing the long-standing maladaptive practice of Caribbean peoples’ viewing Standard English as superior and the indigenous languages as inferior. The colonized consciousness of some African Caribbean should be adequately responded to by the discipline of Caribbean Psychology. The use of Caribbean people’s indigenous languages in theory, methods, and research activities is essential.

Other African-derived features of Caribbean societies include the oral tradition, proverbs and parables, music, dance, art, social patterns, burial rituals, existential beliefs about the nature of the human personality, and Africanized conceptions of phenomenal time, among other salient life domains (Alleyne, 1996; Kremser, 1993; I. A. Taylor, 1993).

The field of nonverbal behavior has flourished in Western psychology from the 1800s. Yet one is hard-pressed to find studies on the nonverbal behavior of Caribbean peoples. For instance, Africanisms are reflected in African Caribbean’s engaging in “cut eye” and “suck teeth” gestures to reflect anger, impatience, exasperation, or annoyance in similar ways as continental Africans (Dzokoto & Adams, 2007). White research participants were found to be less likely to know the meaning of these gestures (Rickford, 1999). It is
well established that outcomes in interpersonal relationships, in schools, in work, and in interactions with law enforcement professionals are affected by nonverbal acuity (Sutherland & Carrone, 2010). More research investigations are necessary on Caribbean people’s nonverbal communications with special attention to the intersection of ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, and gender and nonverbal behavior.

It is imperative that African-derived features of Caribbean societies be integrated into the discipline of Caribbean Psychology. Caribbean Psychology might consider the use of a variety of methods (folklore, archival data, ethnography, video recordings, vignettes in questionnaires, focus groups, field experiments, and survey studies) to obtain relevant psychological knowledge (Allwood & Berry, 2006).

**Constructionism: A Theoretical Framework**

Indeed, African (Black) psychology in the United States is heavily based on west African cosmology, ontology, axiologies, ideology, and ethos, which constitute the deep structure of African culture (Azibo, 1996; Kambon, 1992). The ascendancy of African-centeredness, that is, constructionism, is evident in the discipline of African (Black) psychology. This approach emphasizes the role of African cultural retentions in the psychology of contemporary people of African descent. Constructionists rely on traditional African sources (i.e., ethnophilosophy) to gain psychological knowledge and insights. The constructionists also believe that African (Black) psychology must simultaneously promote the welfare of people of African descent and advance the critical growth of psychological knowledge (Harrell, 1999).

It has been suggested that the deep structure of several English-speaking Caribbean societies is African, although their surface structures have been Europeanized particularly as a function of British and North American domination (Alleyne, 1996). The task for Caribbean psychologists is to document and interpret the psychohistorical and cultural African linkages. For instance, Maroon communities and rural traditional communities that have retained Africanized beliefs and practices provide rich sources of information (Bilby, 2006).

Hence, the role of Caribbean psychologists is to elucidate the cultural deep structures (axiologies, cosmology, ontology, and epistemology) as well as the African-derived surface manifestations, including family practices, such as extended family structures and kinship bonds; communication patterns, such as call-and-response phenomena; indigenous language systems, proverbs, myths, vitalism, and folkways; and other cultural dynamics. Caribbean psychologists should also explain the impact of Western influences on the
psychological functioning of African Caribbeans. For instance, what are the psychological implications for people of African descent having to simultaneously deal with these contradictory African and European, and other non-African, cultural influences?

A task for Caribbean psychologists is to critically assess and deconstruct Western psychological theories and methods currently being used in the Caribbean. A fundamental concern is the adequacy of these approaches in the study of the psychology of Caribbean populations. Another concern will be to identify Eurocentric theories and approaches that might be useful for working with Caribbean populations. Similar to the work being done in the United States by some Black psychologists (reconstructionists), Caribbean psychologists will need to identify and correct the errors in Western psychology and, if possible, reconstruct Western psychology to more appropriately address the needs of Caribbean populations. Psychologists need to be cognizant that these reconstruction processes and approaches might be fraught with difficulties in view of the aforementioned cultural differences between Westerners and Caribbean peoples.

The Need for a Caribbean Psychology

A Caribbean Psychology is particularly needed as a number of forces have conspired to de-Africanize individuals to the extent that many are losing touch with their African heritage in the Caribbean basin. These forces include the enslavement era; colonialism; neocolonialism; modernization; cultural, political, and economic imperialism; and urbanization (Sutherland, 1997).

Hence, African Caribbean people have been characterized as displaying excessive materialism, greed, and jealousy (red eye and bad mind); wanton individualism; disrespect for their indigenous languages; disrespect for the elderly, women, and children; disrespect for the dead; the devaluing of Blackness; corruption; excessive violence; a sense of hopelessness; and class divisions, among other maladaptive attitudinal and behavioral patterns (Hickling, Matthies, Morgan, & Gibson, 2008). These are deviations from traditional African beliefs and practices (Sutherland, 1997).

The erosion of communalistic tendencies correlates with personal, familial, socioeconomic, and political problems of Caribbean states. Alleyne (1996) indicated that “town people are less committed to collectivism than country people and Jamaicans of all classes are less committed to it than they once were” (p. 159). Social Darwinistic tendencies and rampant individualism are replacing communalistic virtues in Caribbean islands and in Jamaica’s social structure. For instance, it has been suggested that there are those
Jamaicans who are convinced that they can better themselves only at the expense of others. Or as Errol Miller (1999) wrote, Jamaicans have the mentality of “taking the opportunity to exploit those who are in a weak position.” Miller is correct in arguing that enslavement and colonial conditions have set Jamaicans against each other and against their cultural and historical foundation. Yet in the contemporary era, social scientists need to examine the internal dynamics of Jamaica’s family structures, which are related to these negative attitudes and behaviors. Analysts have discussed the fragmentation of the extended family structure because of economic constraints; rural-to-urban migration; transnational migration to the United States, the United Kingdom, and other foreign countries; urbanization; and the absence of, or the breakdown of, parenting skills. Hence, it is not unusual for poor children to be raising themselves (Narcisse, 2000). The physical and emotional violence inflicted on Caribbean children has also been documented (Barrow, 1996). In other extreme instances, there are those hostile parents who mold their children into violent and ruthless individuals who prey on and destroy their communities for personal self-aggrandizement.

Neurocognitive research findings indicate that children who are exposed to persistent poverty throughout their childhood years as well as to chronic stress are more likely to show significant deficits in their working memory performance in young adulthood than middle- and upper-income children. Working memory allows us to store and to manipulate a small amount of information for short intervals of time, this type of memory is also said to be “essential for language comprehension, reading, and problem-solving, and it is a critical prerequisite for long-term storage of information” (Evans & Schamberg, 2009, p. 6545). The neurological, physiological, cognitive, and academic effects of the very difficult economic circumstances of African Caribbean children should be explored by Caribbean psychologists.

Heather Ricketts (2000) concluded on the basis of her research findings that Jamaicans have a somewhat unfriendly approach to parenting. These parents’ communications generally discouraged the development of self-esteem and self-regard in their children, which can lead to future dysfunctional interpersonal relationships. Research studies indicate that some Caribbean parents use harsh physical and psychological approaches to discipline their children (Samms-Vaughan, Williams, & Brown, 2005). Studies have found that parents’ forceful discipline responses are related to parents’ conservative religious beliefs, such as “if you spare the rod, you spoil the child,” as well as to the belief that physical punishment contributes to character formation. Parents who value obedience and respect, and who hold negative views of the children, such as the belief that “the child is born bad,” might use harsh
discipline in response to the child’s misbehavior (Matthies, Meeks-Gardner, & Daley, Crawford-Brown, 2008). There is a vast body of research findings on the deleterious effects on children who have been exposed to parent-centered child-rearing practices and to harsh parental discipline, including aggression, depression, risk-taking behaviors, low academic performance, and substance abuse, among other problematic psychological outcomes (Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000). On the other hand, robust research findings indicate that parents with positive views of their children, who believe that they could positively influence their children’s behavior, and who are high in self-efficacy tend to rely on noncoercive strategies in response to their children’s misbehavior (Pinderhughes et al., 2000).

Another concern is that it is quite normative for Caribbean parents to make disparaging remarks about Blackness, such as “Nothing Black cyah good,” “yu black and ugly,” and “nutten nah gwann fe yu from yu black” (Blackwood-Meeks, 1999, available at http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com). There is the tradition of the lighter-skinned child being identified as the favorite. These parental practices and messages might influence dark-skinned children to despise their own African features and to develop biases against Blackness, points to which I shall return.

A possible area of exploration is for Caribbean psychologists to explore the degree to which Black parents and other community socializing agents are failing to racially and culturally socialize African Caribbean children to embrace the best of their Caribbean and traditional African values. Wade Nobles (2006) argued that for the Bantu people, the child is like the rising of the living sun into the upper world, and so the child has no limitations. Within African traditional cosmology, the child is the most powerful force of possibility, and the child came to earth to accomplish tasks. The human organism was expected to live an exemplary life, to be mentally alert, and to be disciplined in upholding the moral order. Traditional persons understood that they were to be custodians of the earth. Each person had the responsibility of maintaining the universal harmony. Consistent with traditional African knowledge, Fowler and Christakis (2010) recently reported that their experimental study revealed that a person’s cooperative behavior can have cascading or influencing effects on other individuals to contribute to the public good. It will be important for Caribbean scholars to explore the different aspects of collectivism evident among African Caribbean people.

Other African beliefs are that the African personality is simultaneously teachable and perfectible; it has the capacity for free will and the need to be morally and socially responsible. In traditional African wisdom and philosophy, all things are created by and are of God. All phenomena are characterized
by unity through the complementarity of masculine and feminine principles. It is a reasonable contention that the transmittal of such cultural knowledge to children by parents and by significant adults could aid in the optimal development of Caribbean children. These interventions could also contribute to the diminishing of African Caribbeans’ and other Caribbean people’s sense of hopelessness and despair. They could assist in decreasing the high rates of domestic violence, murder, suicide, and other aberrant occurrences. Hence, Caribbean Psychology will eventually make contributions to improve the applications of psychology to solve problems in the Caribbean region on the basis of appropriate conceptualizations and research findings.

There appears to be an intrinsic relationship between maleness and crime in the Caribbean. Young men ages 15 to 29 account for most of the crimes committed in many Caribbean societies. To understand the psychological behavior of today’s males, it is essential to understand what historical traditions nurtured Africa’s sons in precolonial Africa. Wade Nobles (2006) advised that we must understand ourselves for who we were prior to any engagement with others.

There is research evidence suggesting that from childhood through adolescence, village elders guided male children through the rites of passage. A rite of passage is an experience that marks a life transition in a community (White & Cones, 1999). Rite-of-passage interventions are designed to be community based and to provide a structured and formalized initiation process through which youths can achieve a strong self-concept and ethnic identity that will assist them in coping with the many challenges they will encounter as they enter adulthood (Brookins, 1996). Adolescents go through several stages “that separate them from their previous identity, facilitate their transition to a new identity, and incorporate them into their new role, responsibilities, and status” (Brookins, 1996, p. 402). The essential stages are preparation, separation, transition, and reincorporation. Malidoma Some (1994) suggested that boys and girls who fail to undergo rites of passage are likely to experience “an arrested development” and will be stuck in adolescence for the rest of their lives.

In traditional African societies, males were expected to preserve the village culture and pass it on to the next generation. Boys were taught responsibilities as husbands and fathers. They were taught about proper body care and appropriate sexual behavior. It has also been noted that precolonial African society provided a psychological frame of reference in terms of which a person could achieve his potential and personal effectiveness in an interpersonal
environment of productive relationships with others, supported by the spiritual presence of a protective God and the ancestors. In pre-slavery Africa, young men could realistically aspire to roles as fathers, providers, heads of families, protectors of women and children, and decision makers in community governance, following an orderly defined set of rules and customs. (White & Cones, 1999, pp. 22-23)

Slavery and colonialism sought to destroy the African Caribbean male’s sense of being “African” and to de-Africanize him. Yet there were those African ancestors who resisted the plantation owners’ attempts to destroy their masculinity (Shepard, 2000). In the contemporary era, a convergence of negative political, social, economic, and familial factors have contributed to the malevolent attitudes and behaviors of many Caribbean males.

In Caribbean societies, masculinity is defined by traits of aggressiveness, power over others, and by sexual prowess (Narcisse, 2000). The distortions of the male image have led to Black males who developed a “go-for-bad/rude bowy (boy)” male image. These are men who refuse to back down if challenged (White & Cones, 1999). In Jamaica’s garrison communities, the primary aspiration of some men is to be “a shotta” and to make “his duppy.” Other males place emphasis on “looking good” to insulate feelings of failure and a sense of inadequacy. Some males adopt the “cool pose” by suppressing their emotions (White & Cones, 1999). Black males have internalized these scripts without examining how their own African cultural traditions could positively influence their lives. White and Cones (1999) noted that as part of the African-centered masculine ideal, having harmonious relationships could enhance mutually enriching bonds between men and women. Harmonious relationships can build unity in Caribbean communities and reduce domestic violence and other forms of violence.

Most Caribbean children currently live primarily with their mothers, with few children in male-headed households (Hickling et al., 2008). Caribbean psychologists should be strong advocates of Caribbean mothers and fathers conjointly and consistently socializing their sons and daughters to internalize the best of the African values cited above.

Skin Bleaching and Racial Identity

Another important issue is racial identity. In many Caribbean societies, Black-skinned people are experiencing crises in racial “Black” identity. The research evidence is clear that most children during the first 5 years of life have had plenty of contact with stimuli that will eventually negatively influence them
from developing a strong, positive Black identity. Sharon GoPaul-McNicol (1995) and other social scientists have conducted studies that indicate that in the Caribbean basin, there are those Black children who dislike being Black. They believe that they would be rich if they were born White. A number of factors, including the Eurocentric educational systems and churches, the media and popular culture, and parents, as well as other factors, have conspired to influence these children’s psyche. Hence, Black skin remains a thing of shame instead of pride in countries with predominantly Black populations (Jarrett, 2000).

The scientific evidence is also clear that when parents consistently and properly culturally socialize their children, they are more likely to develop a positive personal and ethnic self-consciousness. Moreover, the child who is nurtured and made to feel worthy is likely to achieve personal and professional success.

Among other developmental practices that parents can undertake involve exposing children to their history, providing age-appropriate information on group disparities between Caribbean nation-states and the rest of the world, and communicating to their offspring that they have a critical role to play in the elevation of their nation-states.

There are highly Europeanized Caribbean peoples who are sometimes referred to as possessing a roast breadfruit mentality: “Black on the outside and White on the inside.” Among Jamaicans, the “browning” or “Whitening” phenomena and other negative racial aesthetic occurrences have been discussed in the popular media and scholarly literature. At the extreme is skin bleaching for the removal of skin melanin to achieve a lighter skin tone, which is perceived to be attractive and to be related to upward mobility in Caribbean states (Charles, 2003). Caribbean people do not seem to be connecting melanin to its physiological benefits.

Melanin protects the skin from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation and other dangerous chemicals. Melanin helps to retard the aging process. Melanin, which is found throughout the body, is critical for proper cell functioning and has other advantages (Moore, 1995). It is ironic that while African Caribbean people are attempting to rid themselves of melanin, there are those Whites who are manufacturing melanin because of its advantages. Jules Harrell (1999) indicated that it is “deeply immoral and an affront for African people to change their appearance to approximate the features of Europeans” (p. 22). Indeed, there is overwhelming research evidence that Whites have historically engaged in anti-African practices throughout the global world order (Sutherland, 1997). Harrell also convincingly argued that Black people’s brain processes are affected by negative environmental stimuli.
associated with White supremacy, which in the 21st century is more subtle and sophisticated. Hence, there are those African Caribbean persons whose minds are replete with racist information, thereby allowing them to construe and rehearse this information without being disturbed by its self-deprecating properties. Consequently, people of African descent learn to associate physical beauty, competence, and effective behavior with the White world. This mindset allows Blacks to accept the superordinate-subordinate power relationships of Whites over Blacks. Professor Fred Hickling provided empirical evidence on the relationship between African Caribbean persons’ rejection of a positive racial identity and mental illness (Hickling & Hutchinson, 1999).

There is a definite need for Caribbean societies to provide cultural environments in which there is affirmation and valuing of “Africanity” and “Blackness.” There must be strong collective resistance to the proliferation of information through the educational systems, television, radio, and film that advances presentations of rich, beautiful, and competent White people and the inferiorization of people of African heritage (Shepard, 2000).

People of African heritage lost control of their internal affairs and were the victims of White domination under colonialism. Yet there are those African Caribbean persons who are experiencing excessive difficulties and have expressed their desire for the more direct caretakership of their former British colonial rulers. These Blacks believe that White colonialists better served their rights and interests. Obviously, research studies are needed to establish the degree to which African Caribbean people’s actions show the accommodation of their psyche to racist information and their psychological dependency on colonial and Eurocentric knowledge systems.

Caribbean psychologists will also need to deconstruct creolization, which perhaps operates to diminish African elements. A fundamental concern is to explore the degree to which creolization, roast breadfruit mentality, and other racial identity issues are associated with African Caribbean people’s devaluing their African racial identity and cultural practices. To illustrate, it appears that there are those elite creole Jamaicans in particular who find African “Black” assertions, such as Black History Month, Emancipation Day, and the teaching of Garveyism, to be controversial, problematic, and offensive (Charles, 2003).

It is critical to underscore that people of African descent must resist internalizing the myths that a positive racial identity is unimportant and that no color bars exist in the Caribbean. At the same time, it is important to note that to be pro-Black does not mean to be against any other ethnic group (Herring, Jankowski, & Brown, 1999). However, it has been shown that the internalization of the color-blind myths correlates with passive acceptance of racial victimization and White domination and the failure to mobilize for national
development (Robinson, 1999). It is apparent that identity issues will be central to the new discipline of Caribbean Psychology. Another central issue for Caribbean psychologists is to provide explicit definitions of a Caribbean identity.

Throughout Caribbean societies, including Jamaica, there are colonized consumers and vast cargo cults (Harrell, 1999). Caribbean people, similar to continental Africans and diasporan people of African descent, are involved in nonproductive rituals of awaiting cargoes with goods produced by overseas Whites and other non-Africans. Many Caribbean Blacks do not consider the evidence that only about one third of 1% of all business receipts generated in the U.S. economy goes back to Black businesses. Moreover, people of African descent do not seek explanations for the root causes of the disparities that favor Whites and marginalize Blacks throughout racially stratified societies (Harrell, 1999). Mental health practitioners need to address the crippling effects of oppression in Black people who doubt their own competence. These practitioners should promote the self-correcting processes for the restructuring of Black people’s mindsets for the development of Caribbean nation-states.

Similarly, mental health professionals will need to address how Caribbean people can resist Western materialistic values that have led to various self and collective disasters. African Caribbeans must seek to increase their awareness of the forms of stimuli that are potentially toxic. This will be therapeutic in the healing of the African Caribbean psyche.

Caribbean psychologists are particularly needed in rural communities. It is evident that rural populations are experiencing many psychological difficulties associated with poverty, violence, unemployment, community underdevelopment, substance abuse, and family disruptions. Scholars have also discussed Caribbean people’s belief in spiritual disease caused by Obeah, Pukumina, Rootwork, Voodoo, and other spiritual practices. Caribbean psychologists will need to strengthen the intellectual explorations on the role of indigenous cultural belief patterns and rituals in psychological disturbances as well as in healing practices (Grills & Rowe, 1998; Lefley, 1981). Caribbean traditional healers should play a critical role in Caribbean psychologists’ activities on African-derived religions and practices.

The new discipline of Caribbean Psychology will need to address the suffocating class system that engenders divisiveness and other social and familial profanities among Caribbean people. Throughout Caribbean societies, people are divided on the basis of political affiliations, religious denominations, class status, and ethnic background. There are divisions and disparities along gender lines. There are divisions defining urban and rural dwellers and “uptowners” and inner-city “downtowners.” Severe personal and social difficulties
have been experienced as a function of such divisiveness. The traditional African viewpoint was that whether rich or poor, we were all royal relatives. This promoted social equality (Sutherland, 1997). A priority objective of the discipline of Caribbean Psychology must be to enable Caribbean people to recognize that unity is critical for sustainable regional development.

Similar to the work being done by African (Black) psychologists in the United States, Caribbean psychologists must communicate to the masses that the acceptance of core African values is essential to the mental health of people of African heritage. Hence, some psychologists (the constructionists) would function to regenerate the cultural memory of people of African heritage through teaching, advocacy, research, and clinical practices.

While the University of the West Indies offers psychology undergraduate and graduate degrees at its Jamaica, Trinidad, and Barbados campuses, psychology is still an underdeveloped discipline in the Caribbean. There is a definite need for the establishment and expansion of departments of psychology in all the campuses of the University of the West Indies and at other institutions of higher learning. Indeed, theoretical developments will emanate from the collective experiences and cultural realities of Caribbean people. Another recommendation is that personality theories, child development theories, mental health theories, cognitive paradigms, forensic psychology, and other theoretical approaches be developed and refined by scholars and students committed to understanding the psychology of Caribbean people. Clearly, the developers of Caribbean Psychology will define the theoretical parameters, socially relevant research themes, and methodological approaches of their own autonomous discipline. Theoretical frameworks related to applied work in the areas of employment, health, education, conflict management, and other life domains must also be a priority of Caribbean psychologists (Adair & Kagitcibasi, 1995).

Collaborative relationships should be developed between Caribbean psychologists and psychologists of African descent working in the United States, in other Western countries, and on the continent of Africa. These cooperative relationships will naturally assist in accelerating the rate of development of Caribbean Psychology. Alliances between and among psychologists of African descent will be mutually rewarding for all involved participants.

Caribbean Psychology must be a tool for restoring African Caribbean and other Caribbean people to optimal mental health. This is necessary for a new self-confidence to develop and ignite the Caribbean spirit for national development throughout the Caribbean region. In this regard, holistic perspectives and multidisciplinary approaches will prove useful. In other words, multidisciplinary approaches (i.e., philosophy, history, social theory, economics,
spirituality-religiosity, education, cultural studies, education, criminal justice, industry, etc.) must be relied on by Caribbean psychologists to adequately address the multiplicity of factors defining the Caribbean experience. Socially involved psychologists should also inform public policy makers about the need to remedy the educational, mental, employment, and other societal disadvantages experienced by Caribbean low-income citizens, who are primarily of African descent throughout the Caribbean.

In conclusion, Caribbean psychologists must be agents of social changes in those Caribbean societies that are inimical to the psychological, emotional, and physical well-being of group members. Hence, mental health professionals and practitioners must be strong advocates of social revolutions that will engender positive functioning in Caribbean people. The challenge for Caribbean psychologists and other healers is the reconstructing of the Caribbean mind for the renewal and sustainable development of Caribbean societies.

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