



Essay

Linda James Myers: The Process of Recovering and Restoring African Cultural Consciousness

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Abstract

An intellectual history of ideas produced by Linda James Myers assists in adding to the voices representing women in African-centered psychology. A focus on Myers' scholarship also contributes to expanding the literature and knowledge base about theory, research, and practice pertaining to African-centered psychology and Africana/African American/Black Studies. Myers' work provides creative and thought-provoking ways of articulating and understanding African-centered concepts that are in conversation with other African-centered psychologists and cultural scientists. This examination will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on Myers' intellectual contributions in the following areas: (1) becoming a Sakhú Sheti; (2) engaging in epistemological disruption; and (3) applying components of Optimal psychology as a tool for recovering, restoring, and applying African cultural consciousness. It is intended to provide background and context to Myers' scholarship. Major themes and concepts will be gleaned from her scholarship to pull together various elements of Myers' contributions to African-centered psychology.

Keywords

African-centered psychology, African worldview, Optimal psychology

Introduction

Linda James Myers is an Emeritus professor of psychology at Ohio State University in the Departments of African American and African Studies and Psychiatry who specializes in psychology and culture; moral and spiritual identity development; healing practices and psychotherapeutic processes; and the intersections of race, gender, and class (Jackson-Lowman, 2014). She received a B.S.E. in Psychology and Special Education from Emporia University (formerly Kansas State Teachers College), a M.A. in School Psychology from Emporia State University, and a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Ohio State University. Myers is one of the leading theorists and innovative scholars in African-centered psychology.

The impact of Myers' contributions to African-centered psychology have been recognized by several entities. In her capacities as scholar, teacher, healer, and public intellectual, Myers has served as the 23rd President of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi); named Distinguished Psychologist by ABPsi; received the Bethune/Woodson Award for Outstanding Contributions in the Development of Promotion of Black Studies from the National Association of Black Studies; and has been highlighted in *History of the Association of Black Psychologists: Profiles of outstanding Black Psychologists* (Williams, 2008). Myers has presented her ideas and conducted workshops in England, Jamaica, Ghana, and South Africa (Jackson-Lowman, 2014). Traveling throughout the African diaspora has heavily influenced Myers' understanding and application of the African worldview paradigm she advocates. This is evidenced in her books which include: *Understanding an Afrocentric worldview: Introduction to an Optimal psychology* (1988); *Our health matters* (2003); *Blessed assurance: Deep thought and meditations in the tradition and wisdom of our ancestors* (2004); and co-editor of *Recentering culture and knowledge in conflict and practice* (2008). Collectively, Myers' books and articles illustrate how she seamlessly merges the theoretical and the practical into an African-centered praxis.

Critical work on Myers is vital to the intellectual history of African-centered psychology on several levels. Although Black women have made significant contributions to African-centered psychology (Belgrave, 2018; Jackson-Lowman,

2014; Myers, 1993; Sutherland, 1997; Welsing, 1991), the dominant narrative about pioneering scholars in African-centered psychology tends to disproportionately focus on men (Jamison, 2018). Reflecting on this imbalance, Myers (2010) states “it is time for the restoration and return of feminine principles, a balance which Africana female psychologists can bring along with their other contributions” (p. 202). Thus, an intellectual history of ideas produced by Myers assists in adding to the voices representing women in African-centered psychology. A focus on Myers’ scholarship also contributes to expanding the literature and knowledge base about theory, research, and practice pertaining to African-centered psychology and Africana/African American/Black Studies. Myers’ work provides creative and thought-provoking ways of articulating and understanding African-centered concepts that are in conversation with other African-centered psychologists and cultural scientists (Ani, 1994; Semaj, 1996). This examination will focus primarily, but not exclusively, on Myers’ intellectual contributions in the following areas: (1) becoming a Sakhu Sheti; (2) engaging in epistemological disruption; and (3) applying components of Optimal psychology as a tool for recovering, restoring, and applying African cultural consciousness. This article is intended to provide a brief sketch that provides background and context to Myers’ scholarship. Major themes and concepts will be gleaned from her scholarship to pull together various elements and weave an intellectual portrait of Myers’ contributions to African-centered psychology.

Becoming a Sakhu Sheti

For Africans in the diaspora, being and becoming African has been a process (Gallman et al., 2007). A process that occurs within a social milieu that consistently denigrates and degrades all things African and/or associated with Africa. In spite of conscious and concerted efforts to dehumanize African humanity, descendants of Africans throughout the diaspora have attempted to recover, reclaim, and restore those fragmented and fractured aspects of their African cultural selves (Nobles, 2013). How does an African descended person in the diaspora recognize and acknowledge oneself as African while living in anti-African environments? Within African psychology, the concept of Sakhu, or the illumination of the soul/spirit and its behavioral manifestations among African people (Nobles, 2006), has been an indispensable component to reconceptualizing African psychology, and the specific

ways African descended people have articulated ideas about being and becoming African (Gallman et al., 2007; Nobles, 2006). The Sakhu Sheti, or the Sakhu practitioner (Nobles, 2006; Tolukun, 2021), takes on the major role and function of facilitating the process of cultural and psychological transformation.

The rudimentary foundation of Myers' thought process as it relates to being and becoming a Sakhu Sheti (Nobles, 2006; Tolukun, 2021) can be situated in her upbringing. Myers was born in western Kansas and states that "My ancestors were among those people of African descent who moved west after emancipation from European American chattel enslavement in search of their own land, the opportunity for self-determination, and the desire to raise their families in peace" (Williams, 2008, p. 245). This reflection illustrates that Myers first exposure to, and experience of, the core values of agency, self-determination, and the quest for freedom were initiated by her internalizing the lived experiences of her ancestors. The lessons she learned after reflecting on these experiences continued to shape and mold her social, cultural, and intellectual development. For example, Myers explains how her background impacted her life trajectory when she recalls how, as a young child, she thought "deeply about God and why would he allow people to mistreat other people who were good" (Williams, 2008, p. 447). As her thinking developed, Myers attempts to resolve these contradictions (Wright, 1984) within the context of an African worldview framework.

In seeking the Sakhu (Nobles, 2006), Myers acknowledges the philosophical and cultural conflicts involved in worldview analysis. Myers is clear on how her early experiences as a child later evolved into a structured theoretical and conceptual framework. Reflecting on the manner in which her early childhood experiences have impacted her thinking, Myers states:

Suffice it is to say coming early in life to the place of understanding the negative attitudes and behaviors of the racists/white supremacists have nothing to do with me but are a reflection of their own insecurities and inadequacies...I have come to see that all who adopted the conceptual system, mindset, and worldview of the racist would behave similarly, regardless of race or ethnicity. (Williams, 2008, p. 448)

Myers, furthermore, describes and explains the environmental factors that impacted her individual sense of self and prepared her to make larger collective connections to the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) when she asserts:

I have spent most of my professional career in the heart of America at Ohio State University. The challenges there have not been easy, but great for the development of a theory of Optimal Psychology. I was likely selected to become President of ABPsi and Distinguished Psychologist...my agenda in taking the office was to move the organization (ABPsi) forward in the development of resources to better meet the mental needs of people acknowledging African descent...My greatest role models were my parents and those ancestors upon whose shoulders I stand. (Williams, 2008, p. 449)

It can be gleaned from these statements that Myers was socialized and nurtured in an environment that personified the values that influenced the African-centered concepts she would build and expand on during her academic and scholarly career. Myers' lived experiences contribute to her conceptualization and articulation of a worldview paradigm. Combined, these lived experiences contribute to Myers' being and becoming a Sakhu Sheti.

Epistemological (Dis)Ruptures

Myers understands the cultural significance and heuristic value of contributing to the construction of a new paradigm. As a member of the culturally congruent school of thought (Myers, 2009), Myers assumes the position that the struggle for a revolutionary and liberatory social science (Akbar, 1984, Kuhn, 2012) and the battle for African minds must center epistemological issues and all that emanates from that intellectual terrain. Epistemology, a central component of the African worldview paradigm, refers “to the way or method of knowing or coming into an understanding of reality, of what is real” (Kambon, 2012, p. 127). Expanding on Kambon's definition, McDougal (2015) notes, “A race or cultural group's epistemology explains how that group approaches knowledge acquisition. African epistemology emphasizes affective cognitive synthesis as the way of knowing reality, as well as through symbolic imagery” (p. 44). An African worldview is demonstrated by the aspects of ethos, values and

customs, and psycho-behavioral modalities that include the following: (1) oneness/harmony with nature; (2) survival of the group; (3) inclusiveness/synthesis; (4) cooperation-collective responsibility; (5) spiritualism-circularity; (6) complementarity; and (7) humanism-religious (Kambon, 2012). In contrast to African epistemology are the ethos, values, and customs and psycho-behavioral modalities associated with European epistemology which consists of: (1) control/mastery of nature; (2) survival of the fittest; (3) exclusiveness/dichotomy; (4) competition-individual rights; (5) materialism-ordinality; (6) intervention; and (7) a rhetorical etic of humanism disguised under the cloak of European/white supremacy that is grounded in supposed “universal” religious principles (Ani, 1994; Kambon, 2012).

The epistemological rupture conducted by Myers occurs when her scholarship discusses the notion that African epistemologies and European epistemologies are not only different but appear to be in direct conceptual conflict with each other. Thus, her theories and research are rooted in African epistemologies that venture outside the conceptual constraints and cultural standards imposed on African descended scholars through European academic and intellectual hegemony. McDougal (2014) explains that epistemological rupture involves African descended scholars rejecting and debunking some of the foundational arguments posited in traditional Eurocentric disciplines by providing new perspectives grounded in Africana historical and cultural experiences. The concept of epistemological rupture is useful in understanding how African-centered scholars address the impact of theoretical and conceptual gaps left behind in the wake of European colonization and control of land, resources (material, scientific, and intellectual), and access to information (Semaj, 1996). Regarding research, knowledge production, and dissemination, Myers’ position is similar to African-centered scholars doing epistemological rupture and cultural construction work within the context of Eurocentric, Western-oriented academic intellectual spaces (Akbar, 1984; Kambon, 2012; Nobles, 2006).

Historically, African-centered psychologists have wrestled the researcher’s paradox (Carruthers, 1972) as they sought to define and develop a cultural science (Semaj, 1996) specific to the needs of African descended people. As a cultural scientist trained in research methods and methodologies associated with the discipline of psychology, Myers dealt with the issue of having to operationalize concepts in a manner that is quantifiable, measurable, and observable (hallmarks of the European epistemology). Within this vein, Myers (2010) contends:

One of the challenges to African psychology in the context of mainstream western psychology in the academy and research funding opportunities are the limitations imposed by the prevailing cultural episteme. The requirement to quantify and make evident through counting, measuring, and manipulating the constructs about which we speak, usually through paper and pencil measures, is the *only* path to ‘knowing’ the dominant culture recognizes. (p. 201)

Myers’ attempts to address the epistemological issues in her scholarly work, and in the process, disrupts and confronts the epistemological violence that forces African people to alter and/or abandon their African cultural ways of knowing. Considered as a whole, the epistemological ruptures practiced by Myers and other African-centered psychologists can be viewed as examples of intellectual marronage (Goldson, 2020; Hotep, 2008; Roberts, 2019). After fleeing conceptual incarceration (Nobles, 1986) and moving toward epistemological liberation, intellectual maroons relocate themselves into a position from which they engage in intellectual warfare (Carruthers, 1999), while simultaneously seeking to build more just and humane lives for African descended people grounded in Africana cultural realities. Myers’ conceptualizing of African ways of knowing and approaching African psychology are ingrained in her understanding of culture. For Myers (2009), culture is paramount to understanding not only African people, but humanity as a whole:

Our understanding of humanity is culture bound. *Culture* is the social force that informs our designs for living and patterns of interpreting reality...legitimate psychological study of humanity can be facilitated by giving appropriate regard to the cultural underpinnings informing our perceptions and shaping our interpretations of reality. Included in the self-critical analysis should be considerations of the ways the nature of reality, knowledge, axiology, cosmology...are conceived. (p. 35)

Myers conceptualization of Optimal psychology, as theory and technique, opens the way for the practice of what has been referred to as ritual technology (Wood-Menzies et al., 2019). This can be viewed as the use of cultural and spiritual practices to purposely obtain and/or achieve a particular goal or transformative mode of being.

Henry (1997) concurs with Myers' (1993) articulation of the aspects of di-unital thinking in an Optimal psychology when he opines, "In precolonial Africa, the world of inner nature was not radically separated from that of outer nature. The latter (outer nature) was seen as a manifestation of the former (inner nature). Hence the two were inextricably connected" (p. 18). Myers' exploring and implementing diunital alternative methods/ritual technologies (Wood-Menzies et al., 2019), informed by African epistemologies as means to experience and examine transcendent African consciousness, is reflected in Henry's (1997) observation on epistemic frameworks:

...techniques for displacing the ego, and in general creating space for the revelations of inner nature. Ego displacement was facilitated by the rhythms of the drums. Invitations to the deities of inner nature to fill the space left by ego displacement also went out on customized drums rhythms...In addition to ego displacing, knowledge of inner nature was also achieved through divining and the use of oracles. (p. 19)

Henry's comments reinforce and illustrate Myer's ideas about Optimal psychology and the type of paradigmatic shift that is crucial for transformative therapy.

The dynamic and interactive relationship between client and practitioner/Sakhu Sheti (Nobles, 2006; Tolukun, 2021) is of vital importance to this process. According to Myers (2018), evidence of the dialectic aspects of this relationship is congruent with and enhanced by Belief Systems Analysis principles. Healing is operationalized when: (a) client's self-esteem is based on intrinsic self-worth; (b) when clients are empowered to define reality for themselves (self-knowledge); and (c) clients develop a spiritual base manifested by faith, harmony, and patience.

Armah's (1979) *The Healers* describes and explains the historical and contemporary role and function of healers for African descended people. Just as Armah (1979) outlined the traits and attributes of healers, Myers (2018) identifies the following prerequisites for healers: (a) belief in the conceptual system one is promoting; (b) ability to engage in the belief system of the client and ability to point out the benefits of altering systems; (c) ability to continue to evolve with the client; (d) an understanding that the client and therapist share a common context; and (e) awareness of the difficulties and challenged inherent in making the transition from one conceptual system to another. For Armah (1979), healers participate in the process of

healing themselves as they establish rapport and engage in reciprocal affiliations with their clients. Although Armah's (1979) conceptualization of healers extends far and beyond the narrow confines and definitions of a specific discipline, it has implications for an African-centered perspective of psychology that transcends disciplinary boundaries and lends to an embracing of Nobles' (2013) notion of Sakhu Djr. Nobles (2013) defines Sakhu Djr as a process of "conducting a deep, profound, and penetrating search, study, and mastery of the process of 'illuminating' the human spirit or essence, as well as all human experience and phenomena" (p. 294). Thus, the cultural processes integrated within the theoretical and therapeutic approaches employed by Myers are examples of the epistemological disruptures she poses to the restricted constraints contained in many of the formalized expressions of psychology.

Conversations with My Brother:

African Collective Consciousness and Unconsciousness

An example of how esoteric knowledge functions in psychology, relative to consciousness and unconsciousness in Myers' articulation of surface and deep structures of culture, is illustrated in her discussion of intellectual exchanges with Bynum (1999) and his concept of the African unconscious. Both Myers (1999) and Bynum (1999) focus on the relationship between psychology and mysticism. In *The African unconscious: Roots of ancient mysticism and modern psychology*, Bynum (1999) argues that the human species "evolved from the same root...this African origin had a relevance to human psychology" (p. xxiii). For Bynum, this observation implies that the collective consciousness and unconscious of humanity can be traced to the African origin of humanity. Bynum (1999) suggests that "forms of the racial memory and the findings of modern sciences" (p. xxvi) are expressions of an African unconsciousness. Myers (1999) is of the opinion that Bynum's (1999) work highlights the "potential interrelatedness and interdependence of life forces...From its African beginnings, we can see variations of this model of reality, it's essentials (deep structure) intact," as it spread throughout all of humanity. Following this approach, Myers and Bynum observe these connections as they manifest in different traditions and provide specific examples that demonstrate how they speak to similar universal principles.

Bynum (1999) interrogates cultural traditions as diverse as the mysterious seafaring Celts of the North; the astronomical language and hieroglyphics of the

Alogonguins of the West; the Yoga roots of the Dravidians of India; the Australian Aborigines; and the Kundalini phenomena of the San. He argues that there are connections between these traditions and their African origins, although many scholars remain uninterested in these connections. In much the same way that Bynum draws on ancient texts to demonstrate particular archetypes that transcend space and time, Myers also borrows from diverse figures such as Moses, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus Christ, and Prophet Mohammed to highlight deep structural connections between traditions that might be interpreted as different on the surface level of culture. For example, Myers makes connections between Moses, Jesus Christ, and ancient Kemetic/Egyptian thought by bringing to light that they both were initiates in Kemetic/Egyptian mystery schools. Myers (1985), furthermore, demonstrates the deep structural connections across traditions in her African-centered reinterpretation of the Lord's Prayer. Myers' (1985) reinterpretation reads as follows:

Our being that is in Oneness inviolable is your Truth/Law. Our realization of Oneness be with us. Thy will be done, so that we no longer believe in our separation. Give us day by day our highest good, and grant us relief from payment for our seeing ourselves as separate, for we also grant relief to everyone that might owe gratitude and recognition to us. And do not let us be aroused by false hope for false desires of pleasure or gain but protect us from things that bring suffering. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. (p. 39)

Whatever the religion/spiritual systems, Myers argues it is paramount that we return to the African source of all the ancient wisdom systems. As Myers explains the African origin of, and continuity within, various spiritual/religious systems throughout the world, she articulates her understanding of not only the origin of different spiritual/religious conceptual constructs but also the universality of those cultural thought systems, as expressed throughout the world. According to Myers (1985), whether the ending of the prayer is expressed as Amen, Ameen, or Amen Ra, the fundamental universal principles are consistent. With these reinterpretations of various spiritual texts within an African centered context, Myers unites the conscious and unconscious aspects of African deep structural thought. In doing so, Myers exhibits the perceptive agility to integrate spiritual and cultural traditions not

necessarily associated with the African worldview (and at times considered to be oppositional and/or outside the framework of the African-centered paradigm) and reimagine them through an African-centered interpretative lens. This African-centered interpretive lens provides Myers with the theoretical and intellectual fluidity to blend various distinct traditions into a holistic way of approaching, analyzing, and understanding not only African culture, but the deep structural African roots that bind apparently disparate manifestations of cultural traditions together.

Notes On Understanding an Implementing an African-Centered Worldview Through Optimal Psychology Theory

In sketching and tracing the development of her own thinking about and understanding of African-centered worldview that evolved into the theory of Optimal psychology, Myers (2010) reflects, “By the late seventies I had developed a Black model of psychological functioning called a Oneness model, which sought to analyze and build upon the unity of the sacred and the secular in African cultural traditions throughout the Diaspora and on the continent” (p. 196). For Myers, what is referred to as Black Psychology, has been less about “Blackness” as a racial/biological construct, and more about “Blackness” as a social/cultural construct. In this vein, Myers interprets this to mean that the nomenclature “Black” Psychology is “a psychology that represented all that black symbolized, the absorption of all the energies and colors of the spectrum into One, all of humanity into One. It is from this backdrop that I developed the theory of Optimal Psychology” (p. 196). Hence, African/Black Psychology is a psychology that embraces worldviews that originated in Africa absence of white supremacy and are applicable to and optimal for all of humanity. According to Myers (1988), an optimal worldview consists of: (1) viewing the spiritual and material as one; (2) knowing self through symbolic imagery and rhythm; (3) valuing positive interpersonal relationships among people; (4) emphasizing the union of opposites; (5) processing the interrelatedness of human and spiritual networks; (6) identifying the extended self and the multidimensionality of self; (7) assuming self-worth is intrinsic in being; (8) valuing spiritualism, oneness with nature, and communalism; (9) being positively consistent despite appearances due to relationship with the source; and (10) having a life space that is infinite and unlimited.

As her conceptualization of the “Oneness” model developed, Myers was aware of and intentional about emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between unity (oneness) and diversity (multiplicity/variety). In reference to her understanding of the African worldview paradigm, Myers (1988) states:

the purpose of identifying such a paradigm/theory is not to replicate the surface (i.e. specific practices or beliefs) of African culture. What is being articulated is a conceptual system in pure form, which will be reflected, in the way one views the world and can be adopted by anyone across cultures and time...The point is that the conceptual system seems to have originated in Africa. (p. 35)

Key to Myers’ approach to analyzing commonalities and differences between various Africana expressions of culture is the concept of surface and deep structure levels of culture. Nobles’ structural model of surface and deep levels of culture (Kambon, 2012; Nobles, 1986) describes the manifestations, aspects, and factors involved in cultural constructs and expressions of worldview. The surface structure comprises manifestations of culture that are expressed in language, symbols, ideas, behavior, beliefs, and rituals (Jamison, 2008; Nobles, 1986). These manifestations represent the surface level because they are readily recognized as aspects of culture expressed by African descended people throughout the African diaspora. The deep structure consists of aspects of culture (worldview, ethos, ideology) and factors (epistemology, axiology, ontology, and cosmology). These deep structure cultural factors are not as visible as the surface manifestations. Thus, they often go unseen and are invisible to those who are unaware and not trained to recognize the subtleties and nuances of the African and African diasporic episteme. The surface and deep structural levels of culture are linked as they work together to form interlocking systems that enhance understandings of the cultural substance/content and cultural values of a particular group. Cultural substance/content gives meaning to the overt manifestations of culture (surface culture expressions) and cultural values (deep structure meanings) provide order and direction to the manner in which these principles are applied (Jamison, 2017; Nobles, 1986).

The epistemological rupture that occurred during the cultural imposition of European hegemony affected African and African diasporic culture. How do African descended people recover from the epistemological rupture that took place during

and in the aftermath of the Maafa? Did not this rupture impact the ability of African descended people to maintain and sustain their cultural values and behaviors? It is important to emphasize how Myers (1987) consistently reminds us that “our purpose in supporting the resurgence of the deep structures of African culture is not for the replication of ancient surface structure culture in modern times” (Myers, p. 78), but the recovery of a conceptual system, which “allow[s] the outward form to change freely while focusing on its source, inward spirit that is unchanging” (Myers, 1978, p. 78). From this perspective, Myers explores culture through a perspective that considers the generalities and specificities of African diasporic communities.

Scholars of the African diaspora (Brown, 2012; Gomez, 1998; Rucker, 2008; Thornton, 1998; Young, 2007) have developed a robust body of literature that discusses the varied ways that Africans employed African epistemologies as compasses to establish cultural coordinates, utilized to understand reality, and adapt and adjust to their new natural and social landscapes. According to these scholars, although the actual physical location was different, for many Africans, the general landscape was familiar enough to be able to apply African cultural constructs as general patterns and designs for interpreting their reality (Brown, 2012; Nobles, 1986). Gomez (1998) builds on Stuckey’s (2013) idea that the formation of a composite African identity in the diaspora was formed during the colonial and antebellum periods when Africans and descendants of Africans, who survived the middle passage, chose to exchange their specific ethnic/country marks for a broader and more expansive African identity, vast enough to include various ethnic groups under the collective gathering notion/nomenclature of African (Outlaw, 2016). These historical examples are in alignment with Myers’ (1987) conceptualizations of surface and deep structures of culture and how human beings use these structures to adapt and adjust to material conditions. In this intertextual exchange between areas of interest in Africana intellectual thought, Myers’ African-centered psychological articulations of culture are in alignment with African diasporic historians who address issues relative to cultural transformation. The latter examines how African people throughout the diaspora engaged Western environments and reconstructed, reinterpreted, and reimagined their cultural orientation as they apply old world knowledge to confront new world realities (Walker, 2001; Young, 2007).

Optimal Psychology Theory (OCT) as Liberation Psychology

Early articulations of African/Black liberation psychology have focused on the importance of liberatory theory (Azibo,1994); the development of Black empowerment (Wilson, 1998); the political role and function of Black psychologists (Kambon,1989); and the relationship between African psychology, community psychology, and liberation psychology, (Brookins, 1999). In addition, Thompson and Alfred (2009) argue that Black liberation psychology should be involved in the following activities: (a) increasing critical consciousness; (b) improving relationships; (c) organizing socially and politically; (c) promoting positive mental health functioning/self-care; and (d) enhancing academic achievement. Myers' (2018) liberation psychology is situated within the context of Thompson & Alfred (2009) because it seeks to elevate human consciousness by: (1) recognizing and overcoming the conceptual incarceration, mental bondage, and metaphysical alienation created by the epistemic violence of intellectual and cultural imperialism; (2) confronting the mentacidal oppression preventing the achievement of true mental health and sustainable well-being among all people, the oppressed, and oppressors; and (3) identifying the resilient and resistant forces of psychological, cultural, and social praxis that have withstood unimagined cruelty, oppression, and disenfranchisement over the centuries.

The liberatory function of OCT principles become practical and a way to advance the best interests of African people when they are “collectively implemented as social policies, laws, institutional practices and procedures” (Myers, 2010, p. 72). Within Myers' (2010) liberation psychology, a spiritually transformative and/or liberation psychology is constructed on “the lessons learned and sacrifice of people acknowledging African descent...surviving 400 years of the terrorism of enslavement and extended psychological bondage” (p. 78). Myers' references to the Maafa (Ani, 1994) and its impact on economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex, and war (Fuller, 1984; Welsing, 1992) is demonstrative of Myers' capacity to discuss spiritual issues while not ignoring the social aspects that must be addressed as well. Myers asserts:

Optimal psychology teaches how we create reality and can wield the power within us through the many forces not recognized in the fragmental materialist

worldview to achieve our purpose and destiny. Oppression and control of the African mind is maintained by the intellectual imperialism and conceptual incarceration imposed by a suboptimal cultural worldview widely adopted by the captors of African people and their progeny. (Maat, 2010, p. 199)

It is evident in this type of thinking that the cultural, spiritual, social, and political can be addressed within the parameters of Myers' holistic Optimal psychology theory.

As scholars continue to conceptualize theoretical constructs, Myers maintains, "it is required we pay particularly close attention to the factors fostering survival, resistance, and triumph in the face of the worst forms of this extended oppression" (2010, p. 68). Thus, for Myers, the systematic study of the lived experiences of African descended people is much more than sorrowful narratives about oppression or victimization studies. While acknowledging and confronting oppression and victimization is vital to the cultural recovery process, the essence and greater value of the cultural work is in uncovering and restoring a historical and contemporary memory that builds on the long tradition of African people demonstrating cultural agency. Why are African people still here to tell their story? What strategies and techniques did they implement to ensure their survival? How did improvisational acts of African ingenuity and creativity contribute to maintaining and perpetuating a knowledge of self that anchored them in a cultural homeplace? Myers contends that the resolute resilience of the universal human spirit, in its' particular manifestation through African people, explains why African people are still here to share and add to their historical and cultural narrative.

African descended people in the African diaspora have recovered, reconstructed, and reimaged African culture. They have utilized universal African cultural patterns and expressed them in specific and nuanced ways, depending on the context of their specific environments. Awareness of the connection between universal cultural patterns and the specific expression of that cultural pattern is critical to understanding cultural recovery, cultural restoration, and historical memory. An accurate understanding of this dynamic facilitates in locating, and understanding, the methodological approach of the diasporic African. Relative to this methodological approach of recovery and restoration among diasporic Africans, wa Thiong'o notes, "Forced into a crypt, the African in the diaspora tries to break out of the crypt, and grasp whatever African memory he can reach, to invent a new reality" (p. 63). wa

Thiong'o provides a specific context for the scholarship of diasporic African-centered social scientists, like Myers, who are engaged in the important work of cultural recovery and reconstruction, as they invent new realities. In Myers role as a cultural scientist committed to reclaiming and revitalizing components of African worldviews that can be applied in our contemporary context, she is at the forefront of a cultural and social movement that seeks to improve the lived experience of African descended people through the holistic implementation of an optimal worldview.

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