



The Association of Black
Psychologists

Culturally-Grounding and Supporting Our Communities During COVID-19 Worldwide Pandemic

Culturally-Grounded Conceptualizing and Contending with COVID19

by

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The Association of Black Psychologists, Inc. (ABPsi) is extremely concerned about this most recent threat and its psychological and emotional impact. ABPsi does not endorse or support any unsubstantiated beliefs and/or proposed strategies for responding to the COVID-19 Worldwide Pandemic. In the spirit of *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), The ABPsi, along with its partners, will offer a variety of resources (e.g., podcasts, statements, webinars, etc.) in helping our communities cope with the pandemic from a culturally-affirming stance. We are appreciative to our Bay Area chapter for authoring this statement paper that was published in the local newspaper.

Greetings, ABPsi Family and Friends,

I appreciate having been asked by the current President of ABPsi, Dr. Theopia Jackson, to share some insights with regard to a culturally-grounded way of conceptualizing and contending with COVID19. With the extensive cultural erasure that has been imposed, particularly over the past four decades, it is not surprising that the only way most of us have to process and make sense of what is going on with COVID 19, or anything else for that matter, is the dominating cultural world view propagated by the human trafficking captors of our non-immigrant African ancestors. While many of us may have intuited there had to be something seriously wrong with the minds and/or cultural world view of captors who thought it okay to caste enslave our ancestors as chattel to build their personal wealth and that of this nation, we assume in error that mindset was back then and things are different now. Given our current programming there is good reason we fail to recognize that what we are witnessing today, as humanity sits on the brink of destruction in all areas of life, are the 21st century consequences of that same suboptimal worldview. The good news is that the outcomes this flawed, fractured, faulty mindset has generated are no longer sustainable and the opportunity for transformation is at our door. The question is will you open the door and step through to the other side? The COVID 19 serves the requirement and functions to make clear for all the necessity to begin to question and think for themselves, engage in critical self-reflection, elevate their consciousness, and participate in collective dialogue and analysis to strategize and find a new way forward. Many realities hidden due to the manipulative control the suboptimal mindset affords those leading

the masses for their own self-interested benefit, must be faced and challenged, so all of the good can be found, built upon, and spiritual alienation overcome.

At the core of the suboptimal cultural worldview into which we are mis-socialized is the false premise that reality is essentially a material phenomenon with a separate and secondary spiritual aspect. Despite the fact that the height of western scientific knowledge, following the path of the African wisdom tradition and eastern philosophies, has now several thousands of years later confirmed reality's spiritual nature, which sometimes manifests at a vibration slow enough for our five senses to perceive. There is a reason the powers that be support training of the masses to focus on materiality or what their five senses inform and they can control, it facilitates ease of control, increasing their ability to program the consciousness of the subjugated in ways most often unnoticed. Such an externalized focus diverts attention away from the power source of the victimized (control of their own consciousness) and places their power in the hands of those who seek to manipulate and control the masses for material profit and personal gain. So we are mistaken if we think this is the first time in history the nations' leadership has blatantly ignored the science, the data, to create an alternative reality. It is not, indeed such behavior is normative and foundational to the functioning of this nation starting with the creation of race/racism/white supremacy as a distraction from the real motivation for the caste enslavement of African people as chattel, materialistic greed. The suboptimal mindset of materialistic greed has remained the primary driver for laws, social policies and practices today. It is time for that to change.

With gratitude I humbly offer a brief overview from our ancestors' cultural worldview in the African wisdom tradition of deep thought dating back to the beginnings of human culture and civilization. It provides insights and understandings that have now been confirmed across cultural groups, and through Optimal Psychology (OP) or Optimal Conceptual Theory (OCT) in contemporary times. In so doing I want to welcome you to a cultural view passed on from our venerated ancestors on this land which served them well as they not only survived multiple generations of enslavement as chattel without any human rights for at least 250 years, but also 150 years of legally sanctioned domestic terrorism becoming the moral and spiritual leaders of a movement for civil rights for all in this nation, and, the over the past 50 years continued the struggle for equity in all areas of life. If they have done all of that for centuries so we might be, we can certainly manage COVID 19, and here is how.

Given this history it should be clear that the capacity of non-immigrant Africans in America, those enslaved as chattel who built this country's wealth and their progeny, to survive and oft times thrive in the worst of human circumstances is beyond remarkable, and possibly the miracle of modern times. The question Optimal Psychology asked and answered was how were they able to do that and how can we continue to overcome the current systems of dehumanization and attempts at cultural erasure? We know unapologetically that the requirements for achieving Black mental health far exceed those put forth by mainstream western psychology and its prevailing cultural mindset, extending to the illumination of the soul. Indeed Optimal Psychology emerges from research grounded in human history and experiential knowledge. It is not enough to acknowledge the historical realities imposed by our

forbears' captors and their progeny, we must engage the culturally grounded knowledge passed on that has served us well for over four centuries against the most horrific, systems of dehumanization ever practiced in the history of humankind. Thus the mandate of Black/Africana psychology has been to provide this knowledge, wisdom and understanding requisite now and for future generations as we face the current COVID 19 pandemic and other challenges.

When many hear the word spirit their thoughts almost automatically shift to religion, although the two are separate and can be mutually exclusive. In other words, you can be spiritual and not religious, and vice versa, religious and not spiritual. Our use of the construct spirit refers to the all-encompassing presence which is known in an extrasensory fashion, as is energy, consciousness, as well as, Creative Life Force Supreme Being, God/dess, etc. What our ancestors knew and was embedded in our cultural heritage was that what the heart feels, the mind thinks, and the tongue speaks, cause all perceptions to come forth and are therefore causal in the creation of reality. Our optimal cultural worldview allowed us to transcend because ours was a reality in which the spiritual aspect of being was primary and proactive. Not judging by appearance alone, Oneness of being with all life was assumed. One's identity and worth as a human being was intrinsic, not based on the materialism nor external trappings that predispose people to insecurity, fear, anxiety, addictions, anger/rage, violence and other conditions in society's in which spiritual alienation is commonplace. The interrelatedness and interdependence of all things was understood, such that the sense of self was multi-dimensional, inclusive of ancestors, the yet unborn, nature, and the entire community. To the extent one's thinking, character, and behavior was informed by these assumptions, the source of power, one's consciousness, needed to be aligned with the source of all good, authentic, and functioning on the higher planes of human existence out of the place of health, love, peace, truth, justice, reciprocity, order, balance, and harmony. Often referred to as the embodiment of Maat, or truth, justice, and righteousness in the Khepran philosophy of ancient KMT (Egypt).

Western science has only recently substantiated and established this ancient knowledge as scientific fact. Indeed, it has been confirmed that positive and negative thinking have a profound effect on our health and the functioning of our immune system. In the field of psychoneuroimmunology the science of how consciousness shapes the brain's control of the immune system, research clearly reveals that positive consciousness is responsible for the placebo effect, wherein the mind believing it can be healed from disease most often is. On the other hand, stress and negative thinking creates the opposite effect, which supports disease. For the targets of white supremacy, and all internalizing the sub-optimal mindset, fear of COVID19 only compounds stress. Particularly harmful are the continued threats to survival experienced in a system that has historically assigned value and allocated opportunity based on skin color, disenfranchising Black people. Yet, a peaceful, calm state of mind and healthy self-loving lifestyle are the best prescription for weathering this unprecedented pandemic, as well as, overcoming and disrupting the systems of dehumanization with which we have been/are being confronted. Wielding the power that we have for self-determination, to think and define reality for ourselves, we can build upon the teachings that let us know the purpose of negativity in human experience is for our growth and edification toward realization of our union with the

Divine Infinite. All that is being witnessed with the pandemic has come to hasten the transformation of humankind for the good.

While we must begin with healing ourselves from the systematic destruction of our minds and culture by perpetual cultural imperialism and epistemic violence, our solutions will be for the greater good of the collective, the whole. As we shelter in place, let us use the time to learn more about ourselves, one another, building trust and community. Priority should be given to establishing and strengthening our relationship the Divine within us and within which we are. Learning to love our true, divine selves, showing ourselves the same forgiveness, mercy, grace we would want extended to us and which we would extend to others. Our relationships can be strengthened irrespective of social or physical distancing with increased authentic, non-judgmental communication. Remember the most likely way we make meaning of what others say and their behavior is by what would be true for us, not recognizing that others may by virtue of their experiences, exposures, and meanings made be coming from a place far from what would be true for us. As we liberate our hearts and minds from the sub-optimal to the optimal, from lower to higher consciousness, we can increase our courage and commitment to stand up for what right, just, and fulfill the role we have played historically as the moral and spiritual leaders of our time. It is fitting that our rituals, which often unify the sacred and the secular, demonstrate respect for all life flowing with music and dance. Remember: do not to speak that which we do not wish to create, food is medicine, sleep and exercise are essential, seek fellowship with those that uplift, and stand for good. While I could go on for volumes about this cultural view and have, suffice it to say for now that COVID 19 is here as a call for all the good to emerge, and to provide a new opportunity for forward leadership with authenticity, overcoming the deception and exploitive manipulation that becomes commonplace without proper spiritual anchoring and a moral compass to provide direction. Create a sacred space in your environment to remind you of who you are, where you are, and why you are here without fear.

Selected Resources

- ABPsi and CHN Family-Care, Community-Care and Self-Care Tool Kit: <https://www.abpsi.org/pdf/FamilyCommunitySelfCareToolKit.pdf>
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
- Helping Homebound Children During COVID-19 (CSTS): https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Helping_Homebound_Children_during_COVID19_Outbreak.pdf
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255
- The Steve Fund Crisis Text Line Partnership Text STEVE to 741741 (*utilizes counselors of color*)
- Supporting Your Family During Quarantine and Isolation: Tips for Social Distancing, Quarantine, and Isolation during an Infectious Disease Outbreak (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA): <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/tips-social-distancing-quarantine-isolation-031620.pdf>
- Taking Care of Family Well-being (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, NCTSN): https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf
- WHO Mental Health Considerations during COVID-19 Outbreak: <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf>

If you have resources that you would like ABPsi to disseminate, please contact Dr. Tiesha Nelson, GA Chair: t.nelson@abpsi.org.

If you would like to consult with chapters or members in your region, please contact our Regional Representatives.

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The Association of Black Psychologists, Inc. (ABPsi) sees its mission and destiny as the liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivenment and illumination of the African Spirit.
www.abpsi.org

A family tie is like a tree; it can bend but it cannot break.
~African proverb