

# **AFRICAN-CENTERED PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH: THE INTEGRATION OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE**

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For the past 100 years, the field of psychology has studied individuals from a strictly Euro-centric point of reference. As a result, minority populations have consistently been pathologized. It is important to be aware of the various culturally competent practices at our disposal so that we may continue to instill Hope, Wellness and Recovery in the lives of our clients.

One of the most pertinent barriers to providing mental health services to the African American community is engagement. One treatment approach that has demonstrated effectiveness in the engagement, as well as addressing the mental health issues of African Americans adults, is the African-Centered Psychology Approach.

“African-centered psychology is concerned with defining African psychological experiences from an African perspective, a perspective that reflects an African orientation to the meaning of life, the world and relationships with others and one’s self” (Parham, 2002).

Before a working relationship is even established, it is important for the therapist to *create an ambiance* or atmosphere that allows an African American client to locate a “personal comfort zone.” This can be created through the type of artwork, colors, smells, etc., a therapist uses to decorate their office. These details tell the client you have some information and identify in some way with their culture.

The use of *music* and *ritual* is also an engagement strategy used in the African Centered Psychology Approach, as it facilitates a connection between the therapist and the client who are engaging in the ritual together. Music has long since been a part of African American tradition, brought to the Americas from African slaves. It has influenced most, if not all, music we listen to today. Rituals can be either simple or complex, but must be decided collaboratively and be comfortable for both client and clinician. Examples of rituals can include but are not limited to: a handshake, reading passages from a book during session or pouring libations “to invite the spiritual presence of the creator and ancestors, or elders of the family, into therapeutic space” (Parham, 2002).

African Americans are less likely to seek mental health treatment, and when treatment is sought, it is more often in an emergency setting (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). With that being said, it is imperative that mental health providers demonstrate cultural competency in order to increase the probability of engaging African Americans in treatment.

For additional information, please reference *Counseling Persons of African Descent: Raising the Bar of Practitioner Competence*, Thomas A. Parham (2002) Sage Publications