

Running head: AFRICAN-AMERICAN SELF-OPPRESSION

Behavioral Consequences of Self-Oppression for African-Americans: Relationship among African Self-Consciousness, Self-Responsibility, and Life Satisfaction

Marquetta Brown

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between the African self-consciousness construct, self-responsibility, and life satisfaction as predictors of self-oppression among people of African descent (Africans and African Americans). Based on Baldwin's (1981, 1984) Black Personality theory, the recognition and materialization of the African self-consciousness construct are significant to the survival of persons of African descent (Africans and African Americans). Twenty Africans from Nigeria and twenty African-Americans from St. Louis will complete the African Self-Consciousness Scale, Self-Control Scale, the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Correlational analyses will be used to investigate the nature of the relationship among the African self-consciousness construct, self-responsibility, and life satisfaction. This detailed investigation of the relationship among African self-consciousness, self-responsibility, and life satisfaction is important in achieving a better understanding of self-oppression among persons of African descent.

Introduction and Significance

In the United States, several mechanisms exist that may cause an individual or any group of individuals to feel oppressed. However, whereas oppression is strongly associated with various groups of people, especially minority groups (e.g., women, physically challenged people, and non-White people), the identification of an exact origin of oppression among these minority groups is a complex task (Baldwin, 1980, 1981, 1984; Baldwin & Bell, 1985; Mahlik & Pierre, 2005). When investigating oppression among African Americans (Blacks), for example, the organization of slavery, the misuse of power by White politicians, “Black-on-Black” exploitation, and many other demeaning acts can be correlated with their socially-constructed oppression. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of research investigating the oppression of African American people (Blacks) in the United States (c.f., Baldwin, Bell, & Duncan, 1992), the lack of awareness of the African self-consciousness among African Americans (Blacks) has not been empirically demonstrated to be associated with individually-promulgated (i.e., self-) oppression. Thus, the purpose of this research proposal is to establish empirically how the African self-consciousness construct is meaningfully associated with the well-being of Nigerians (Africans) and African Americans (Blacks).

According to Afrikan (Black) Personality theorist Joseph Baldwin, the African self-consciousness construct is a derivative of Black Personality theory. As Baldwin (1984) explains, “Black personality consists of a core system called *African Self-Extension Orientation* and *African Self-Consciousness*, and a number of basic traits emanating from the core” (p. 180). Consistent with this theory, the African self-extension orientation is the premise of the Black personality, and can be defined as the organizing principle of the entire system. As such, the African self-consciousness construct is innate (biogenetically determined), unconscious, and operationally defined by the concept of “spirituality”--a dynamic energy that allows the self to merge (extend) into the totality of phenomenal experience (Baldwin, 1984).

The derivative of the African self-extension orientation is the African self-consciousness (ASC). According to Baldwin (1984), the African self-consciousness is essentially undifferentiated from the

African self-extension orientation under normal conditions, i.e., it is the “conscious level” expression or dimension of the African self-extension orientation. Like many conscious-based theories, the ASC is environmentally sensitive as well, meaning that it is also subject in part to environmental determination. The African self-consciousness construct is thus the survival thrust of the Black personality and includes the following: recognition of oneself as “African” (e.g., biologically, psychologically, and culturally) and of what being African means as defined by African cosmology; recognition of African survival and proactive development as one’s first priority value; having respect for and active perpetuation of all things African, such as African life and African institutions; and having a standard of conduct toward all things “non-African” or toward those things (people included) that are “anti-African” (Baldwin, 1992).

From this perspective, the recognition and the materialization of the ASC is pertinent to the healthy development of anyone who is of African descent (Africans and African Americans). More specifically, it is the individual who has the responsibility of creating and maintaining a healthy African self-consciousness, as defined above. Should an individual of African descent choose to ignore such notions (i.e., the content of the ASC construct), he or she may be setting limitations on appropriate self-development, and instead be contributing to the development of self-oppression.

The significance of this study is thus not to “blame the victims of oppression”, but to better understand the role that Africans or African Americans (Blacks) may play in their own oppression. This research would not only benefit mental health professionals who work with people of African descent, but can also offer insight into what might contribute to the feelings of oppression among Africans and African Americans. Financial support and recognition from SIUE to investigate what role an individual may play in his or her own oppression will benefit not only individuals who are of African descent but also the families and communities that they are apart of.

Literature Review

Past research has investigated African self-consciousness and Black racial identity as predictors of psychological distress and self-esteem for Black men. Mahlik and Pierre (2005), for example, found evidence to suggest that young Black men who reinforced themselves against racism by internalizing their

racial identity attitudes reported less psychological distress and greater self-esteem than those who did not. Interestingly, these results both supported and contradicted Baldwin's (1981, 1984) encouragement of resisting anti-African/Black forces. Whereas the Black participants in Mahlik and Pierre's (2005) study reported higher self-esteem and less psychological distress as a function of identifying with their racial heritage, the Black men who associated themselves with the Black group reported low self esteem. As an explanation of this contradiction, the authors suggested that "either that Black men who had lower self-esteem tended to identify more with Blacks than Whites or that Black men felt worse about themselves when identifying with Blacks compared with Black men who identified with Whites. Regardless of which interpretation reflects the direction of causality, both interpretations point out that identification with other Blacks is connected to important feelings about oneself for Black men" (p.36).

A related series of findings has been reported for the self-esteem of Black women. Falconer and Neville (2000), for example, examined the relationship of body mass, African self-consciousness, skin color satisfaction, and body image satisfaction of Black women. In a sample of 124 Black women from a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), in general, "African self-consciousness, skin color satisfaction, and body mass were associated with body image satisfaction. African self-consciousness was significantly positively correlated with appearance orientation, suggesting that the higher ASC scores were associated with increasing body satisfaction."

Furthermore, Baldwin, Bell, and Duncan (1992) investigated the association of social cultural setting and background characteristics as it relates to African self-consciousness. Consistent with Black personality theory, the results of their study supported the notion that Blacks in a predominantly Black setting are more socialized into the African American cultural reality and therefore have healthier Black personalities than do Blacks in a predominantly White setting. As discussed by Baldwin et al.(1992), "these findings suggest that predominantly Black academic settings may indeed have a more positive influence on African self-consciousness than does a predominantly White setting" (p.290). In further support of this notion, results also indicated that older students, upper level students, Black Studies

majors, and students with all-Black elementary experience had higher scores of African self-consciousness than the other students.

Goals and Objectives

In some life situations, to be satisfied with life a person must first be satisfied with his/ her own perception of self. For an individual to be satisfied with the perception of self, a person must have take responsibility in all situations that involve developing a through sense of personage. Perception of self may cause a person to become more self-aware (Duval, Duval, & Mulilis, 1992). Once a person becomes self-aware (biologically, psychologically and culturally), he or she may benefit by taking sole responsibility for anything or any situation that involves conception of self. In this context, life satisfaction must be fostered by the individual. Otherwise, self-oppression is likely to occur.

The purpose of this study is thus to investigate the relationship among African self-consciousness, self-responsibility, and life satisfaction in the lives of Africans and African Americans. As previously mentioned, there is currently no published research that has been conducted concerning African self-consciousness focusing on actual natives from Africa. Even though both African and African American cultures have been subject to White influences, I propose that, consistent with Baldwin's (1982) Black personality theory, Africans will score higher on the ASC scale than Blacks, due to the notion that native Africans may not be as culturally stigmatized as Blacks in America. I also propose that those individuals who score high in African self-consciousness will also score high in self-responsibility and life satisfaction.

Materials and Procedures

The populations that are of interest in this proposed study are Africans from Nigeria and African Americans from the St. Louis community. To obtain samples from these two groups, the study will be solicited in several Human Development Offices in St. Louis and Nigeria. An administrator or contact person will assist with the contact of participants. Both locations have several resource centers that serve as a catalyst for the betterment of African communities. My goal is to obtain 20 native Africans

(Africans) and 20 African Americans (Blacks). Data collection will take place at St. Louis Community College at Forest Park and at The University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Participants will be asked to provide demographic information (e.g., name, age, and race) before completing a packet of questionnaires relevant to the constructs previously mentioned. African self-consciousness will be measured by the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985; see Appendix A). Self-responsibility will be measured by the Self-Control Scale (Tangy, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004; see Appendix B). Life satisfaction will be measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985; see Appendix C). All participants will be assigned a number to keep their demographic information and survey responses confidential. Once all data are collected, a correlational analysis will be conducted to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship among African self-consciousness, self-responsibility, and life satisfaction, and a series of independent measures *t*-test will be conducted to determine significant differences in the reported scores between Africans and African Americans. Also, to stay consistent with the general philosophy of psychological research and to methodologically control for confounds, in this experiment it is required that the same experimenter administer the surveys and interviews at each location. Furthermore, if there are going to be two different experimenters administering surveys and interviews in each location, the results that are obtained from the surveys may be due to the differences between the experimenters rather than true relationships' among the variables of interest. Lastly and most critically due to the regulations and guidelines of the URA, there is very limited time to correct any errors that may significantly affect this study.

Time Line

May-2005- Human Development Office Solicitations

June-2005- Sample Collection

July-2005- Participant Selection

August-2005- Official Research Date and Location Assignment

September-2005- Part I of Study (St. Louis Community College at Forest Park)

October-2005- Part II of Study (University of Ibadan in Nigeria)

November-2005-Data Organization and Analysis

December-2005-Presentation of Final Draft to URA board

References

- Baldwin, J. A. (1981). Notes on the Africentric theory of Black personality. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 5(3), 172-179.
- Baldwin, J. A. (1984). African self-consciousness and the mental health of African Americans. *Journal of Black Studies*, 15(2), 177-194.
- Baldwin, J. A., & Bell, Y. R. (1985). The African Self-Consciousness Scale: An Afrocentric personality questionnaire. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 9(2), 61-68.
- Baldwin, J. A., Bell, Y. R., & Duncan, J. A. (1992). African American psychology: theory, research, and practice. California: Sage.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 49, 1-5.
- Duval, S., Duval, V. H., & Mulilis, J.P. (1992). Effects of self-focus, discrepancy between self and standard, and outcome expectancy favorability on the tendency to match self to standard or to withdraw. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 340-348.
- Falconer, J. W., & Neville, H. A. (2000). African American college women's body image: An examination of body mass, African self-consciousness, and skin color satisfaction. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 24(3), 236-234.
- Mahalik, J. R., & Pierre, M. R. (2005). Examining African self-consciousness and Black racial identity as predictors of Black men's psychological well-being. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11(1), 28-40.

Budget Justification

Commodities

Printed Surveys.....\$10.00

**The surveys will be administered to the participants in paper and pencil format. This item will cover the costs of printing and copying the survey materials.

Telecom

Calling card.....\$200.00

**The successful completion of data collection at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria will only be possible by thorough and detailed communication with research collaborators in Nigeria. This item will cover the costs of telephone communication prior to my arrival in Nigeria.

Travel

Transportation to St. Louis..... \$20.00

Flight to Nigeria.....\$570.00

**These items will fully cover my transportation expenses to Lambert International Airport in St. Louis and help partially cover the cost of a round-trip airplane ticket to Nigeria.

Appendix A

ASC SCALE

Please indicate your level of agreement with the items below using the following scale. Your rating for each item should be written in the blank space before each statement. Your responses will remain completely anonymous. Please be open and honest when responding to the items.

- | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------------|----------|--------------|----------|----------|-----------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Strongly Disagree | | Disagree | | Agree | | | Strongly Agree |
-
- ___ 1. I don't necessarily feel like I am also being mistreated in a situation where I see another Black person being mistreated.
- ___ 2. Black people should have their own independent schools which consider their African heritage and values an important part of the curriculum.
- ___ 3. Blacks who trust Whites in general are basically very intelligent people.
- ___ 4. Blacks who are committed and prepared to uplift the (Black) race by any means necessary (including violence) are more intelligent than Blacks who are not this committed and prepared.
- ___ 5. Blacks in America should try harder to be American rather than practicing activities that link them up with their African cultural heritage.
- ___ 6. Regardless of their interests, educational background and social achievements, I would prefer to associate with Black people than with non-Blacks.
- ___ 7. It is not such a good idea for Black students to be required to learn an African language.
- ___ 8. It is not within the best interest of Blacks to depend on Whites for anything, no matter how religious and decent they (the Whites) purport to be.
- ___ 9. Blacks who place the highest value on Black life (over that of other people) are reverse racists and generally evil people.
- ___ 10. Black children should be taught that they are African People at an early age.
- ___ 11. White people, generally speaking, are not opposed to self-determination for Black people.
- ___ 12. As a good index of self-respect, Blacks in America should consider adopting traditional African names for themselves.
- ___ 13. A White /European or Caucasian image of God and the "holy family" (among others considered close to God) are not such bad things for Blacks to worship.
- ___ 14. Blacks born in the United States are Black or African first, rather than American or just plain people.

- 15. Black people, who talk in a relatively loud manner, show a lot of emotions and feelings, and express themselves with a lot of movement and body motion, are less intelligent than Blacks who do not behave this way.
- 16. Racial consciousness and cultural awareness based on traditional African values are necessary to the development of Black marriages and families that can contribute to the liberation and enhancement of Black people in America.
- 17. In dealing with other Blacks, I consider myself quite different and unique from most of them.
- 18. Blacks should form loving relationships with and marry only other Blacks.
- 19. I have difficulty identifying with the culture of African people.
- 20. It is intelligent for Blacks in America to organize to educate and liberate themselves from White-American domination.
- 21. There is no such thing as African culture among Blacks in America.
- 22. It is good for Black husbands and wives to help each other develop racial consciousness and cultural awareness in themselves and their children.
- 23. Africa is not the ancestral homeland of all Black people throughout the world.
- 24. It is good for Blacks in America to wear traditional African-Type clothing and hair styles if they desire to do so.
- 25. I feel little sense of commitment to Black people who are not close friends or relatives.
- 26. All Black students in Africa and America should be expected to study African culture and history as it occurs throughout the world.
- 27. Black children should be taught to love all races of people, even those races who do harm to them.
- 28. Blacks in America who view Africa as their homeland are more intelligent than those who view America as their homeland.
- 29. If I saw Black children fighting, I would leave them to settle it alone.
- 30. White people, generally speaking, do not respect Black life.
- 31. Blacks in America should view Blacks from other countries (e.g., Ghana, Nigeria, and other countries in Africa) as foreigners rather than as their brothers and sisters.
- 32. When a Black person uses the term "Self, Me, and I" his/her reference should encompass all Black people rather than simply him/herself.
- 33. Religion is dangerous for Black people when it directs and inspires them to become self-determining and independent of the White community.

- ___ 34. Black parents should encourage their children to respect all Black people, good and bad, and punish them when they don't show respect.
- ___ 35. Blacks who celebrate Kwanzaa practice the "Nguzo Saba" (the Black Value System), both symbolizing African tradition, don't necessarily have better sense than Blacks who celebrate Easter, Christmas, and the Fourth of July.
- ___ 36. African culture is better for humanity than European culture.
- ___ 37. Black people's concern for self-knowledge (knowledge of one's history, philosophy, culture, etc...) and self (collective) determination makes them treat White people badly.
- ___ 38. The success of an individual Black person is not as important as the survival of all Black people.
- ___ 39. If a good/worthwhile education could be obtained at all schools (both Black and White), I would prefer for my child to attend a racially integrated school.
- ___ 40. It is good for Black people to refer to each other as brother and sister because such a practice is consistent with our African heritage.
- ___ 41. It is not necessary to require Black/African Studies courses in predominantly Black schools.
- ___ 42. Being involved in wholesome group activities with other Blacks lifts my spirit more so than being involved in individual oriented activities.

Appendix B

Self-Responsibility Scale

Please answer the following items as they apply to you. There are no right or wrong answers. Please choose a number, 1 through 5, that best represents what you believe to be true about yourself for each question. Use the following scale to refer to how much each question is true about you.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all like me		Sometimes like me		Very much like me

- ___ 1. I have a hard time breaking bad habits.
- ___ 2. I am lazy.
- ___ 3. I say inappropriate things.
- ___ 4. I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun.
- ___ 5. I refuse things that are bad for me.
- ___ 6. I wish I had more self-discipline.
- ___ 7. I am good at resisting temptation.
- ___ 8. People would say that I have iron self-discipline.
- ___ 9. I have trouble concentrating.
- ___ 10. I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals.
- ___ 11. Sometimes I can't stop myself from doing something, even if I know it's wrong.
- ___ 12. I often act without thinking through all the alternatives.
- ___ 13. Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done.

Appendix C

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the box to the right of the statement. Please be open and honest in your responding.

- 7 – Strongly agree
- 6 – Agree
- 5 – Slightly agree
- 4 – Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 – Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 – Strongly disagree

- ___ 1. In most ways, my life is close to ideal.
- ___ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
- ___ 3. I am satisfied with my life.
- ___ 4. So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- ___ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.