

# Africentricity: Imperative and Problematics

*SAPACCY Symposium*  
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*By*  
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# Who is Robert Wright?

- A Social Work clinician
- Former:
  - RR-Coord, DDSB
  - Ex.Dir. Ch & Yth Strat.
- Ex. Dir.
  - Peoples' Counselling Clinic
  - ANS Justice Institute
- Taught in 4 MEd Africentric Cohorts
- Pioneer of Impact of Race and Culture Assessments



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# Land Acknowledgement



RSW

Patrick  
Hunter 2015

# Land Acknowledgement

- Turtle Island (North America) houses the traditional territories of hundreds of Indigenous peoples. Here, in Toronto the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

Recognition, Justice, Development



**INTERNATIONAL  
DECADE FOR PEOPLE OF  
AFRICAN  
DESCENT**

**2015 - 2024**

# Towards Balance and Sustainability

- Racism is North America's Original sin, and European colonial presence has done irreparable harm to Indigenous Peoples and has disrupted the delicate balance necessary to live sustainably on the land.
- Acts of reconciliation and reparation are necessary to make amends to the original stewards of Turtle Island to restore balance and sustainability and enable us all to live peacefully here.

# Agenda

- Introduction and Land Acknowledgement
- Africentricity as Mental Health Treatment
- Socio-cultural phenomena – Race and Addiction
- History of African Canadian Substance Use and Trafficking
- Advocacy as Intervention - Advocacy as Diplomacy
- Lunch
- Africentric Practice Q&A
- Eco-mapping – Intervention Planning
- Case study – Tyler in High School
- Case study – Tyler in University
- Deeper questions

# Your Questions Before We Begin

- No matter how brilliant my presentation is, if I don't get to the burning questions you bring, I will have failed you. So I always ask:
- What are your questions before we begin?

# Why Africentricity as MH Practice?

- People of African descent have suffered from over 400 years of colonialism, and disruption of culture, family and spirituality
- This disruption is central to understanding the health of Black folks
- Healing requires an Africentric Mental Health perspective.

“What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.”\*

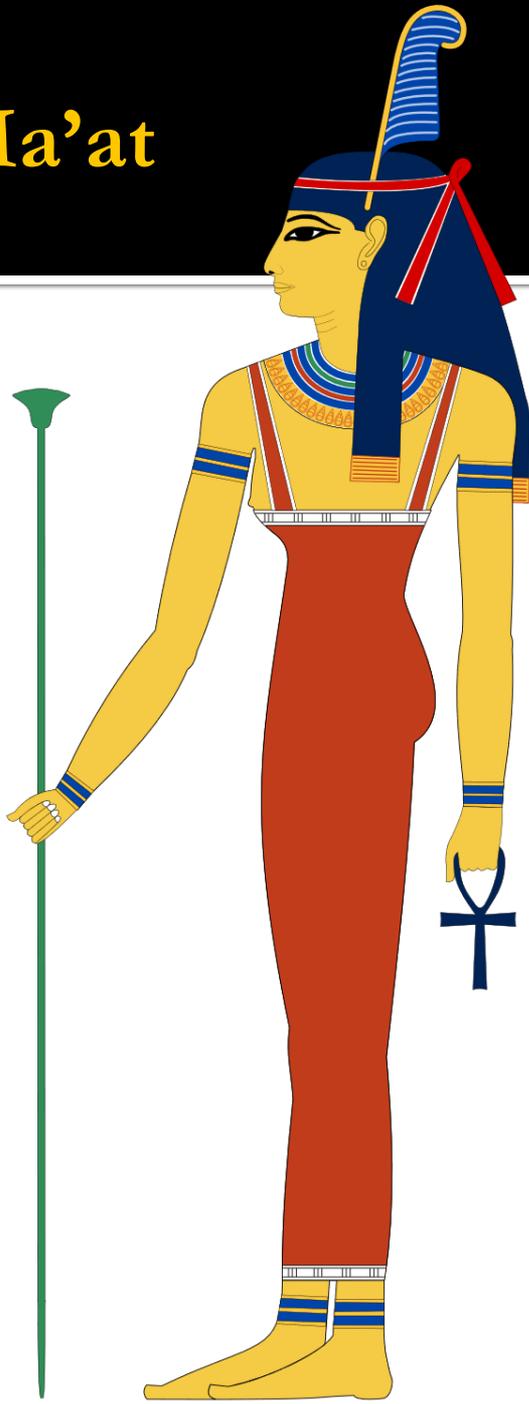
\*The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House, Audre Lorde

# What is Africentricity?



- The academic theory and approach to practice that centres African history and culture.
- First “codified as a practice” by Molefi Asante in 1980
- Nguzo Saba, Ma’at, Ubuntu often associated with Africentricity

# Ma'at



- Ma'at refers to the ancient Egyptian concepts of truth, **balance**, order, **harmony**, law, morality, and justice.
- The goddess, Ma'at, is the personification of those principles

# Nguzo Saba

- The seven principles of Kwanzaa, or Nguzo Saba were developed in 1965 by Mualana Karenga. Expressed in Swahili words, they were designed as expressions of fundamentals of African culture:
  - Umoja (Unity): To strive for and to maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race.
  - Kujichagulia (Self-determination): To define and name ourselves, as well as to create and speak for ourselves.
  - Ujima (Collective work and responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our brothers' and sisters' problems our problems and to solve them together.
  - Ujamaa (Cooperative economics): To build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.
  - Nia (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
  - Kuumba (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
  - Imani (Faith): To believe with all our hearts in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

# Ubuntu and Collectivity

- A Bantu word meaning “humanity”
- Often translated as “I am because we are”
- The greatest principle in African philosophy is the concept of communalism. It is central to African thought, culture, spirituality, and wellness.
- This concept stands in contrast to Eurocentric concepts of individuality and centrality of “object”

# Principles of Africentric MH Practice

- Beyond Western constructions of mental health and treatment, Africentric Mental Health Practice must:
  - Construct and place treatment in a therapeutic community\*
  - Assess racial and cultural identity development and needs (CFI+)
  - Educate about and treat the presence of racial trauma
  - Educate about and promote resistance to anti-Black racism

\*Mkize, D.L.. (2003). Towards an Afrocentric approach to psychiatry. South African Journal of Psychiatry. 9. 3-6. 10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v9i1.128.

# This Work Goes Beyond the CFI

Figure. Flow of Cultural Formulation Interview domains for cultural assessment



- CFI, developed over decades, provides a logical framework for cultural formulation
- Establishes the necessity of understanding clients' cultural narratives

# Addiction - A Socio-cultural Phenomenon

- To understand, prevent and treat addiction we must locate it culturally and apply Africentric principles to it.
- Wright, R. S, and Leader, T. (1997). [Prevention and treatment of addictions among North American persons of African descent: another look at the disease model.](#) Paper available from the authors.

# Hx of African Substance Use Patterns

- Precolonial, culturally bounded, ritualized use:
  - Fireside use by nomadic traders
  - Hospitality shown to honored guests
  - Religious and ritualistic use
  
- Qat, Cannabis, fermented beverages, and a range of hallucinagens

# European Trade Triangle



# Fallacy of Re-habilitation

- Re-habilitation assumes use and addiction is the primary issue:
  - Assumes pro-social functioning pre-drug use
  - Assumes stopping use and returning to pre-use life is desirable and possible

# Colonialism and Enslavement

- Disrupted the culture of African peoples
- Removed all cultural limits around substance use
- Left a gaping “cultural hole”
- Gangster hip-hop, criminal and drug culture may be substantially more functional and accessible than African culture
- Given this, rehabilitation may not be desirable or possible

# Racism and Substance Use and Trafficking

- The Godfather

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D\\_zITtVJGA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D_zITtVJGA)

# Sociocultural Treatment Model

- Critical curriculum that analyzes the past present and future of racialized and Aboriginal peoples
- Use of culturally appropriate & competent facilitators
- Group work focusses on community building and reestablishment of historical cultural norms and practices or the creation of new rituals (e.g. Kwanzaa)
- Community development, political and social activism an essential component to acknowledge and address injustice
- Promotes critical analysis and efforts to reclaim pre-European contact level of cultural cohesion

# ***Advocacy – An Essential Intervention***



# Racism's Effect on All Peoples

- ▶ On BIPOC Peoples
  - ▶ Historical Legacy of Underprivilege
  - ▶ Intergenerational Trauma
  - ▶ Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome\*\*
  - ▶ The Advantage of Disadvantage

\*\*Leary, J. (2017). Post traumatic slave syndrome : America's legacy of enduring injury and healing (Newly revised and updated ed.). Portland, Oregon]: Joy DeGruy Publications.

# Racism's Effect on All Peoples

## ▶ On White People

- ▶ White Privilege
- ▶ White Supremacist Acculturation
- ▶ Absence of Cultural Competence
- ▶ White Empathy, White Guilt, White Fear\*, White Fragility

\*Spanierman, L. B., Todd, N. R., & Anderson, C. J. (2009). Psychosocial costs of racism to Whites: Understanding patterns among university students. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 56(2), 239–252.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015432>

## ▶ On BIPOC Peoples

- ▶ Historical Legacy of Underprivilege
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# Keys to Effective Advocacy

- An advocate must have influence – influence comes from relationship, knowledge, competence and trust
- Advocating for Black clients in white systems requires diplomacy and skill
- It may be essential to share knowledge you have in a way that doesn't compromise the safety and privacy of the client
- “Calling out” and protest are effective forms of advocacy that may not be available to some. Cultivate relationships with activists

# LUNCH

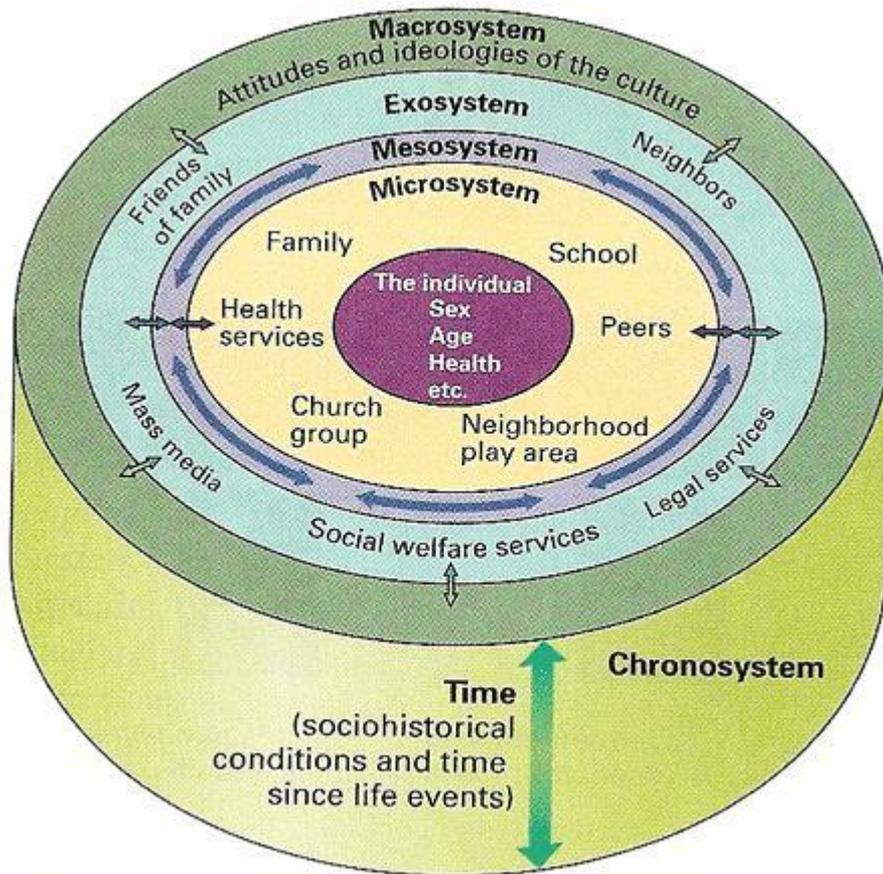


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# Africentric Practice Q&A

- Our Questions so far

# Eco-Mapping – Intervention Planning



- Built on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory
- Self-in Context Mapping

# Following Tyler – High School

- Tyler is Black and grew up in public housing, oldest sibling of 3 boys, his single mom raised him. He was a promising athlete. He was coached and mentored by the best and the brightest young Black professionals in the community.
- In grade 11, Tyler began smoking weed. By November he was a chronic pothead, waking and baking. His grades fell off and his (white) vice principal disqualified him from playing ball. His mother brought him into treatment. Tyler has come but is resistant.
- What more do you need to know about Tyler? How do you begin to engage him and build a treatment plan?

# Following Tyler – University

- Tyler graduated, and with your programme's support was successfully admitted to university. He plays ball, and though in his first year is making a significant contribution to the team
- Tyler does not drink or use drugs, but while at a bar in his small college town he gets into a fight with the drunk college student that goaded him on.
- Tyler gets charged with assault, is suspended from the team, leaves college and goes home where he gets back into “the life”, using and selling drugs.
- What more do you need to know about Tyler? How do you begin to engage him and build a treatment plan?

# Quentin – Tyler’s Younger Brother

- Quentin grew up in Tyler’s shadow. He was not athletic but was “bookish”. He played the piano and organ and sang in the church choir. In high school, Quentin began smoking weed and doing “party drugs”. He would often go to raves with his friends.
- Quentin started having sex with older men by the time he was in grade 11. He would hook up with men who would provide him with “sugar” and drugs to support their “partying”.
- Quentin comes to therapy with his mother who is aware of his drug use and his declining engagement in school, but is not aware that he has sex with men.
- Where do we start?!

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# Resistance to Anti-Black Racism

- I have developed a 6 point plan for my personal sanity preservation (you can be the judge of my success):
  - Identity
  - Competence/Excellence
  - Analysis
  - Independence
  - Process
  - Action
- Wright, R. S. (2010). [Keeping Sane as an African Canadian Working in White Institutions.](#) Unpublished monograph. Halifax, Nova Scotia.

# Resources

- Bell, Peter (1992). *Cultural Pain and African Americans Unspoken Issues in Early Recovery*. Center City, MN: Hazelden
- James, W. H. & Johnson, S. L. (1996) *Doin' Drugs: Patterns of African American Addiction*. Austin, TX: University of Texas
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