Question 6 - Short Answer/Essay 50.0 Points

The text suggests that "self attributes" such as self-esteem, identity, and self concept have been studied more than anything else in African American psychology. How is this not in keeping with what we believe to be the distinguishing features of African American psychology? What are some alternatives? 100-200 words

Exemplary Answers:

Self-attributes are primarily a Eurocentric construct based on an individualistic culture, and they are not experienced in the same way by African Americans. African American psychology strives to study Black people from an Africentric perspective, which is more collectivist or interdependent. The way that African Americans view themselves is dependent on their relationships with family and friends and identification with their racial group more than on introspection, which is usually measured in conventional self-concept scales. Wade Nobles (1991) proposed an alternative approach that would take into account racial identity and significant others in studying African Americans' self-concept. (Janet Uhlir)

Perhaps studying self esteem, identity, and self concept might be problematic because these are all attributes that are valued as areas of focus within individualistic societies, whereas many African cultures are interdependent. It is an approach that attempts to fit the study of African American psychology into the confines of a system designed to measure psychology in a eurocentric manner. Alternatively, it would be possible and preferable to measure attributes that are relevant and valued in interdependent cultures. For example, it may be valuable to study the importance of community and how to make communities function in the best way possible. (Sophia Armington)

The importance of collectivity and the inclusive nature of African American culture have dominated our brief analysis of Afrocentric psychology and the Afrocentric world view. The text's dominant ideas of "self-esteem, identity, and self concept" differ from these previously established characteristics because they are all individualistic and primarily concerned with personal well-being and self-reflection above group prosperity and status. One possible alternative is to shift from focusing on a specific individual's identity to the impact an individual's identity has on the overall group. An interpersonal approach to psychology seems to be better attuned towards assessing an Afrocentric worldview than does an intrapersonal approach. (Sean McKaveney)

Professor Fairchild answered the question like this:

The focus on “Self-Attributes” in African American psychology is curiously non-Afrocentric. Indeed, the focus on the self is a uniquely European preoccupation. African American psychologists have long emphasized the African’s sense of self as deriving from their social connections. Instead of “self-esteem,” the focus should be on self-within-group-esteem, or, more simply, group esteem.

In addition, the focus on the self runs the risk of “blaming the victim” (Ryan, 1981). If a person has good or bad self-concept what is she or he to do about it? The onus of change is on the individual. In the context of African American social reality, self/group concepts are the product of a rejecting social culture. Would it not be more fruitful to study that rejecting social culture, and affect change there?

Question 7 - Short Answer/Essay 50.0 Points
Why (or why not) is the study of Eurocentrism important in the study of African American psychology? (100-300 words)

Exemplary answers:

Eurocentrism is the default worldview in America. White people are brought up in it, and Black people are often assimilated into it. It is important to be aware of Eurocentrism and the ways it is responsible for oppression of African Americans, and to empower those it has oppressed by focusing on Africentrism. Racism in science, including the artificial control and hierarchization inherent in the scientific method, is another issue that must be examined. However, I think studying Eurocentrism on its own overly legitimates it, because to see Eurocentrism, all one has to do is look at any mainstream psychological publication. It is not simply the “opposite” of Africentrism; there are other racially based worldviews that have been submerged by Eurocentrism, and all of them share similarities with each other. I agree with Professor Fairchild’s statement at the opening of chapter 2 that “we need Eurocentrics Anonymous” (30). Eurocentrism ought to be criticized, pried out of our thinking, and manipulated into a worldview that is more inclusive to all racial demographics. (Janet U.)

The study of Eurocentrism is important because we cannot study African American psychology without studying all perspectives on race, especially the perspectives of the dominant European/White culture, since issues of prejudice, race, and the psychology of African Americans is so closely intertwined. Understanding Eurocentrism will assist our understanding of why culture and society was formed and functions the way it does and why African-American psychology and Eurocentric thinking differs on a variety of components. We also need to understand Eurocentrism because it could create biases in the way we examine African American culture and dynamics. We have to understand how biases created by Eurocentrism affects how we look and analyze the data from studies. (Andrew)

Professor Fairchild answers the question this way:

African American psychology has produced many scales that assess African-centered constructs—the African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985), the Asante Afrocentricity Scale (Pellebon, 2011), the Communalism Scale (Bediako & Neblett, 2011), and others—but a search of the literature finds no evidence of a “Eurocentrism” scale.

Many may argue that such a scale is unnecessary because we live in a Eurocentric world—it is the norm. However, Eurocentrism is a construct in its own right—as is Afrocentrism—and ought to be operationally defined to test hypotheses about its relationship to other variables of interest. How does Eurocentrism vary across demographic groups? How does it predict the behaviors of individuals and nation states?
Question 8
What critiques might be raised about Adelbert Jenkins' humanistic approach to African American psychology? (50 - 150 words)

Exemplary Answers:

Adelbert Jenkins’ humanistic approach maintains the assumption that “the self is an active agent” and that people have the ability to make choices and have an active role in shaping their own destiny (71). While this is true in many cases, our cultural and social surroundings have a major impact on our ability to control our own destiny. A culture which puts up “barriers to entry” based on race will influence how people view themselves and others, and will subtly influence how one will go about living their life. Jenkins’ humanistic model claims that “even under conditions of oppression, African Americans are active in shaping their own destiny.”(71). To a degree, this statement is true but African Americans are largely influenced by external factors, such as where you live and what social norms, stigmas, oppression and other social forces are at play in your life. (Andrew Gordon)

Adelbert raises an interesting point. However, because of the ever changing definition of what constitutes Blackness, I believe that diminishes the role of the self as the active agent and strengthen's society's conception of the authentic African American experience which may or may not be in concordance with the individual. Counterpoints to Adelbert's argument are best expressed through Richard Wright's Native Son and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. These books, both authors depict men who have been psychologically scarred from living in an institutionalized racist society. Both characters are incapable of having a healthy identity and are victims of oppression. (Jada Jones)

Professor Fairchild says: Andrew Gordon NAILED it!

Question 9
Racial socialization is the process of teaching children about race. How does this process differ for different "racial" groups? (100-300 words)

The racial socialization process will differ for different racial groups depending on a variety of factors. First, depending on the race, this process may not even be stressed vehemently. Certain racial groups consider membership to their group as being central to identity while other may not think about their race at all. Given that this is the case, in some races racial socialization may not even fully exist. Second, depending on where one is the extent to which they will be racially socialized is altered. For example, if one is living in an area where their racial group is considered a minority, they may be taught more about their race or seek more information about their race than an individual who is surrounded predominantly by others in their racial group. Lastly, many people don't just belong to one racial group. If someone has a very diverse background where they may belong to more than two or three racial groups, learning about one of those will not really teach someone much about themselves or their heritage, and thus it may be easier just to focus on their ethnic group instead because the results will be more fruitful. (Alexandra Frappier)

This process differs for different racial groups because different groups face different problems. For example, African Americans socialize their children to be prepared for being a minority in society, and socialize them in their black culture. Also, African Americans socialize their women to be prepared to be discriminated against as a minority race and then to add being a woman. White Americans do not socialize their children to be minority and do not socialize their children in Black culture. Instead, their children are socialized to believe hard work will pay off and even socialized to feel superior to minority races. So the process differs because each race is equipped with its own circumstances that it was
given, and the children have to be socialized in order to accommodate these circumstances. (Dion Boyd)

According to the text racial socialization is described as the developmental process by which children are able to acquire the behaviors, values, and attitudes pertaining to an ethnic group. These come in the form of messages that are communicated mostly by mothers rather than fathers, producing the opportunity of bolstering the children’s sense of identity even though their life experiences may include exposure to problematic events of racism. In this way, children are able to receive important social cues that help them additionally accomplish the following: relate to personal and group identity; intergroup and interindividual relationships; and position themselves in social hierarchy. Such an important process can be imagined to occur with similar objectives among different racial group but there are some key differences that should be noted. The underlying truth here is that parents can socialize their children in various ways primarily based on their own preferences. Some parents may socialize their children into the mainstream of American society, while others may socialize them as to their minority status within the country. It is not surprising that parents from differing cultural backgrounds would promote different types of socialization, which ultimately evokes different messages to the child. The chapter makes these points clear through introducing a series of experiments that stress the importance of racial socialization on the child’s development. In particular, Gaylord-Harden, Burrows, and Cunningham’s experiment demonstrates that racial socialization was a pathway by which children gained resources for the development of their racial identity and vital coping strategies to handle stressors. Moreover, M. Wang and Huguley made similar positive findings by noting that cultural socialization by parents serves as a buffer against the effects of perceived discrimination by peers and teachers on the topic of grade point average (GPA). All together, although there are differences in how the process of racial socialization may occur, it must be taken into consideration that the end result and objective are similar by producing beneficial outcomes. (Ali H.)