Research Article

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Mental Health Strategies Informed by Black Feminist Thought

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Abstract: There is currently a gap in the literature that explicitly connects Black feminist thought with psychological theory, research, or intervention. This article review aims to assist in filling the gap and inspire scholars to actively utilize the knowledge of Black feminism and apply it to culturally specific mental health resources for Black women. There is a need for a new generation of Black feminists to intentionally center Black women's mental health in psychological research and therapeutic practices. Black women's mental health is an important part of Black feminism, and accordingly psychological theory, research, and intervention should actively incorporate Black feminist thought. This article seeks to call attention to specific ways Black women can preserve and strengthen their mental health and maintain resiliency. Specifically, this review highlights three Black feminist-informed strategies that can aid in supporting Black women's mental health: practicing essential/critical affirmations, raising Black consciousness, and intentional self-definition.

Keywords: Black feminism, Black women, mental health, psychology

Introduction

The intellectual work of Black feminism did not begin in academia. According to Collins, "Ordinary African American women who, through struggles of everyday resistance, created a foundation for this Black feminist activist tradition" (Collins, "Social Construction" 745). Although contemporary Black theorizing often takes place in the silos of academia and in the trenches of grassroots activism, we are not alone since we are standing on the shoulders of our African/Black women warriors who fought for our physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual freedom. Being part of a tradition that affirms Black womanhood, prioritizes Black liberation, and honors a legacy of Black women fighting to center our intersectional lived experiences provides the opportunity to participate in a revolution that is grounded in Black women's authentic healing power. However, broadly in the field of applied psychology the recognition of Black women's healing strategies and efforts are seldom acknowledged. Psychology from a westernized perspective seeks to assist clients in altering their maladaptive cognitions and behavioral patterns. The techniques that clinicians and psychological researchers often use fail to take into consideration the unique experiences of Black women, yet these techniques continue to be used among this group.

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The current research aims to use an interdisciplinary approach by centering Black feminist thought and incorporating African/Black psychology principles to provide potential mental health strategies for Black women. When referring to mental health in this work, we are considering concepts related to psychological well-being and the process of healing. Ultimately, we seek to center the healing power embodied in Black feminism by highlighting mental health strategies that align with a Black feminist approach. The Black feminist movement in the US radicalized the notion of mental health ("Crying for Our Souls" 265). In alignment with the ideas of Black feminist scholars such as bell hooks and Toni Cade Bambara, Black women's psychological well-being is an essential component of Black feminist thought.

In this article, we will first ground our conversation by acknowledging Black indigenous healing practices and locating it within the discipline of African/Black psychology. Then we will outline three categories of Black feminists, which include: traditional Black feminists, contemporary Black feminists, and Black feminist psychologists. In doing this, we seek to illustrate the ways Black women have engaged in strategies that support their mental health. Finally, we will conclude by providing three mental health strategies that are informed by Black feminist thought and African/Black psychology principles which include practicing essential/critical affirmations, raising Black consciousness, and intentional self-definition.

Black Indigenous Healing Practices

Traditional healers have laid the foundation for how Black women engage in a process of healing that intentionally centers the whole person, rather than pathologizing individual aspects of a person. According to Obasi et al., "For people of African ancestry, indigenous healing includes values, beliefs, and a worldview that recognizes a connection between mind, body, and spirit" (944). Historically, Black indigenous healers did not make a clear distinction between the mental, physical, and spiritual since it is believed these components are interconnected and a harmonious relationship is required to ensure an individual's optimal well-being (Ojelade 494). One of the most widely used indigenous healing practices in the Americas and the Caribbean is the Yorùbá-based system of Ifá (Ojelade 494). This system has "diasporic manifestations" and can be seen in various spiritual traditions, such as Candomblé in Brazil, Santeria in Puerto Rico, Lucumi in Cuba, Vodu in Haiti, Shango in Trinidad, and Yorùbá in the United States (Ojelade 494). Healers in this spiritual system are identified as Orìsà priests and they interpret psychological experiences as a manifestation of connected systems between the "person, community, and spirit world" (Ojelade 494).

African/Black psychology is a discipline that is intentional about incorporating these African indigenous healing practices into therapeutic approaches used in the US and across the diaspora (Kambon 30). Although Black feminist thought is mainly rooted in the US context and highlights African American women's experiences, it is important to also consider these indigenous healing practices when thinking about healing strategies for Black women across the diaspora. From an African-centered perspective, "healing is a community endeavor," which means there is support from others as a person attempts to maintain a balance between their mind, body, and spirit (Chioneso et al. 98). This approach is also critical in the ways that feminists engage in their processes of healing; Black feminists argue that healing should take place in community with other Black women, and their modalities of healing (i.e., writing, poetry, body movement) acknowledge the interconnected systems between their minds, bodies, and spirits by creating space for them to reconnect. The creation of this space is necessary because in a western society, we are taught these entities must be separated to maintain professionalism, economic advancement, and distinct job opportunities (Dickens et al. 153). However, this strategy fails to ensure Black women's optimal psychological well-being. This work will highlight the ways in which Black feminists have preserved their psychological well-being by ultimately grounding their strategies in the spirit of Black indigenous healing practices.

Traditional Black Feminist Approach to Mental Health

According to bell hooks, an African American author, professor, feminist, and social activist, the Black feminist movement during the twentieth and at the turn of the twenty-first century prioritized mental health ("Crying for Our Souls" 265). For instance, Toni Cade Bambara, who was an African American social activist, film maker, and author, played a pivotal role in Black women's liberation and constantly reminded us that the "revolution begins with the self" (Hooks, "Crying for Our Souls" 265). She recognized how sexist, racist, and institutional oppression had the ability to inflict psychological wounds among Black women and urged us to find ways to heal from these wounds. Traci C. West is a Black womanist theologian who centers Black women's mental and emotional health by focusing on gender-based violence (West, "Wounds of Spirit" 3). West's work specifically examines the psychological impacts of violence against Black women and contextualizes her analysis through Christian theological principles. West and bell hooks encouraged Black women to seriously consider their mental health and emphasized the need to create "therapeutic strategies for change that would merge feminist political thoughts with movements for self-recovery" (Hooks, "Crying for Our Souls" 265). This combined therapeutic approach is what influenced hooks to write *sisters of the yam: black women and self-recovery* ("Crying for Our Souls" 265). In this text, she utilizes her personal narrative and reflection to emphasize the significance of creating space for Black women to heal; heal from the damage of continuous experiences of sexism, racism, and ancestral/historical trauma.

Not only does bell hooks emphasize the importance of creating these healing spaces, but scholars such as Kimberle Crenshaw also highlight the need of finding "meaningful interventions" on behalf of Black women's unique experiences (1251). Crenshaw specifically coined the term intersectionality to describe the overlapping relationship of race, class, and gender experienced by Black women (1244). In doing this, she overtly recognizes that simultaneous systems of oppression are continuously inflicted upon this group, which requires an intervention that acknowledges their distinct intersectional lived experience. In agreement with hooks, this intervention should include mental health resources informed by a Black feminist politic since we need to simultaneously enhance both our critical consciousness and psychological well-being ("Crying for Our Souls" 265).

Other scholars, such as Audre Lorde and Ntozake Shange, also played a pivotal role in conceptualizing Black feminist healing practices. In Audre Lorde's work, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, she clearly outlines distinct mechanisms that can be used by Black women as a resource for their healing, survival, and advocacy. For instance, Lorde emphasizes the use of poetry as "a vital necessity of [Black women's] existence" since it can aid in reifying language into tangible action (*Sister Outsider* 37). Poetry can create a safe place for Black women to articulate their vulnerabilities in the written form and simultaneously engage with their feelings, dreams, and fears. Lorde explains that the Eurocentric tradition indoctrinated us to believe "I think, therefore I am"; however, the Black mother within each of us reminds us "I feel, therefore I can be free" (*Sister Outsider* 38). Essentially, Lorde indicates that our power resides in our ability to feel and connect with ourselves, which can be attained by means of poetry. Historically, institutional oppression and systematic dehumanization attempted to destroy Black women's ability to feel by way of demonizing their sexuality, commodifying their bodies, and aiming to demolish their spirits (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 38). However, despite these attempts, Black women continued to survive.

In addition to poetry, Lorde argues that Black women's ability to tap into their erotic can also be used as a healing strategy (*Sister Outsider* 56). The erotic derives from the Greek word eros, which is the personification of love (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 55). Lorde describes the erotic as a function of "sharing deeply any pursuit with another person (the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, or intellectual)" (*Sister Outsider* 58). This sharing extends beyond romantic relationships and can be seen when Lorde states, "When I am in touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, depression, and self-denial" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 58). Essentially, the erotic can serve as a storehouse of knowledge, warmth, courage, passion, wisdom, love, and healing for Black women. The erotic empowers Black women by enabling them to say *yes* to themselves without fear (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 57). This power source serves as a means to deeply feel all

aspects of their lives by embracing the Black woman "[she] has been, [is] still being, and will become" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 57; Lorde, *Chosen Poems* 1).

Ntozake Shange also plays an essential role in conceptualizing Black feminist healing practices. Shange is a Black feminist poet, playwright, and author. She uses her work as both a political tool and a means to engage in healing, which can be seen in her text *See No Evil* and her play *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (Barnard Center for Research on Women 04:48–05:00). In *See No Evil*, Shange intentionally disrupts the mechanics of standard English by using vernacular, incorporating other languages, and "playing with different representations on a page" (Barnard Center for Research on Women 03:10–03:37). Shange's written approach is a visual indication of her journey toward healing, which is clearly illustrated when she states, "I cant count the number of times I have viscerally wanted to attack deform n maim the language that I waz taught to hate myself in" (Shange 21). Her writing technique enables her to experience freedom and healing; she attempts to capture the oral tradition of Black people in her written work and this practice is also seen in her plays.

In her play, *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, Shange uses the Black women's body as both "a political tool and a poetic instrument" (Barnard Center for Research on Women 04:38–05:00). She engages the audience in conversations about Black women's experiences with suicide, rape, incest, and abuse. Shange uses the stage to create "healing rituals centered around Black women's body movement" (Barnard Center for Research on Women 08:10–08:28). These rituals can simultaneously take place as Black women participate in the production of this play. Essentially, Shange aids in the creation of "portable healing spaces" by allowing Black women to be in communion with each other as they discuss experiences that are often siloed, silenced, minimized, or erased. Through her work, Shange ultimately reveals that healing can be found in Black women's body movement, oral tradition, poetry, and in communion with other Black women.

Traditional Black feminists, such as bell hooks, Kimberle Crenshaw, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, and other Black women in the 1970s–1990s such as Toni Cade Bambara, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, June Jordan and Alice Walker, all paved the way to develop a self-defined and collective voice that affirms Black womanhood: her strength, her power, and her unique positionality (Collins, "Womanism" 9). Their work ultimately serves as a foundation for both contemporary Black feminists and Black feminist psychologists who actively develop research that centers Black women's unique experiences.

Contemporary Black Feminist Approach to Mental Health

Contemporary Black feminism is used in this article to describe the ways that Black feminists address complex and dynamic issues pertaining to Black women today. This work will specifically provide examples of contemporary Black feminists who developed alternative therapeutic spaces for Black women to discuss issues that can adversely affect their mental health.

Scholars such as Durham, Cooper, and Morris exemplify immediate ways of advocating for the preservation of Black women's mental health by engaging in hip-hop feminism. This theoretical approach is a means to "continuously tackle Black sexual politics by discussing and challenging the persistence and prevalence of hip-hop 'misogynoir' (the hatred of Black women and girls), respectability politics, and compulsory heterosexuality within music and culture at large" (Durham et al. 730). Their advocacy is a redemptive attempt to protect Black women and girls' ability to develop a healthy self-conceptualization. This is needed to counter frequent messages of Black women's worth being embedded in their bodies, countless examples of their bodies being consistently commodified, and their voices historically silenced. This dehumanization prevalent in hip-hop misogynoir provides vivid examples of culturally specific risk factors that can negatively impact Black women's mental health. Black women engaging in hip-hop feminism are creatively reclaiming agency over their bodies and experiences by using various platforms to "mobilize coalitions for grassroots activism and raising feminist consciousness" (Durham et al. 731).

An example of this advocacy in the digital space is the Crunk Feminist Collective blog, which is identified as one of the most successful feminist blogs (Durham et al. 732).

The Crunk Feminist Collective is a group of Black women who connect their "personal politics to hip-hop culture" (Boylorn 75). They use a Black feminist lens when examining their own experiences and vividly exemplify distinct ways of creating community, being vulnerable, and brave (Boylorn 76). This act of participating in an online community of Black people, invested in Black feminist politics, is representative of an alternative therapeutic approach to engage in healing. In these digital spaces, strategies for healing are often exchanged, which makes the information easily accessible and "not hidden behind restricted access journals or chapters in books" (Boylorn 76). The Crunk Feminist Collective is an example of contemporary Black feminists using the virtual space to create opportunities for Black women to focus on their mental health, heal, and acknowledge their "pain, narrative, and isolation" (Dixon 34). Although these platforms are not traditional therapeutic settings, Black women have created space to heal and their processes are valid and should not be dismissed.

It must be noted that psychological support for Black women is not traditionally confined to therapy offices or clinical settings. The incongruity of westernized approaches to mental health care often neglects the cultural significance of informal helping networks, spirituality, and interdependence. Black women traditionally utilize spaces such as church, hair salons, and sister circles as opportunities to navigate and heal from mental health difficulties (Mbilishaka 384). These informal healing spaces can serve as alternative therapeutic and culturally specific healing interventions (Neal-Barnett 267).

Black Feminist Psychologists Approach to Mental Health

In addition to contemporary Black feminists creating these alternative healing spaces, Black feminist psychologists and practitioners are also reclaiming the ways in which we intervene on behalf of Black women in therapy and psychological research. Broadly, in the field of applied psychology, the goal is to observe behavior, recognize patterns, and in the context of a therapeutic relationship aid clients in altering any potential maladaptive behavioral patterns to facilitate a client in their healing process. Psychologists and practitioners are often trained to utilize evidence-based modalities for intervention. However, these interventions largely were not normed, sampled, or created for Black women; yet, are continuously used on Black women. These intervention techniques are not only exclusionary in the ways that they were developed, but can also be used as a justification to support the "inherent" pathology found in Black women. For instance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a treatment that focuses on the reciprocal relationship between an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Macrodimitris et al. 133). However, Black women fighting against racial and gendered microaggressions may not benefit from a treatment that primarily focuses on altering thinking patterns. Black women enduring implicit and explicit forms of racism are not experiencing maladaptive cognitions, but rather are living in a society that intentionally devalues the existence and contributions of Black women.

In addition to this, Black women experience multiple barriers when seeking mental health services. These barriers include stigma, clinician-provider bias, receiving inadequate services, and a lack of awareness regarding mental illness (Jones and Harris 251). In a study that examined Black Women's beliefs and barriers to mental health services, Black women reported ambivalence to seeking treatment, lack of awareness about where to receive services, embarrassment about mental illness, and lack of knowledge about warning signs and symptoms of mental illness (Ward et al. 1589). Research also indicates that Black women's endorsement of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) schema, which highlights the strength of Black women in the face of adversity, may decrease Black women's likelihood of seeking treatment since it is presumed they must carry the weight of the world on their shoulders alone (Nelson et al. 264; Watson and Hunter 604). The endorsement of this schema is associated with anxiety, and when attitudes of the SBW schema are upheld, Black women may conceptualize symptoms such as depression and anxiety as signs of weakness, which can further decrease their likelihood of seeking help (Woods-Giscombe 676).

To intervene, scholars such as Veronica Thomas developed a theoretical approach focusing on the psychology of Black women, which is informed by Black feminist theory, Afrocentric worldview, and a "feminist sensibility to better understand the unique Black women's standpoint" (287). She uses this lens as she recognizes the imperative of placing Black women at the center of analysis when producing psychological research. Another example can be found in Lani V. Jones' work, she is a Black feminist scholar and therapist who places emphasis on the "personal [being] political, emotional wholeness, empowerment, and social change" (Jones, "Sacred Healing Spaces" 249). She argues that these critical concepts should be at the core of Black feminists' therapeutic practices. She also calls for "therapeutic frameworks developed from a Black feminist perspective" that can aid Black women in recognizing "how the internalization of stereotypes and detrimental notions of Black womanhood can contribute to their negative psychological symptoms" (Jones, "Black Feminist Analysis" 252).

Scholar practitioners, such as Jones and Thomas, are examples of Black feminists intentionally centering Black women's mental health. In alignment with hooks, they push for therapeutic spaces and psychological research that can enhance Black women's consciousness in order to fight against implicit and explicit systems of oppression, and strategically empower Black women with culturally specific tools to aid in their healing and recovery (Hooks, "Crying for Our Souls" 265). The work of these scholars exemplifies psychological research and practice that are informed by Black feminist scholarship by intentionally using the therapeutic space to center the unique concerns of Black women. In traditional therapy, race and distinct cultural experiences may not always be understood or seen as pivotal, which can impact how the practitioner selects the treatment and how the client receives services. Essentially, a mental health provider who fails to recognize the cultural components of a Black women's experience are less likely to understand how to help support Black women and their mental health concerns (Etowa et al. 74). As a result of this potential misunderstanding, this conversation is important because we seek to highlight three Black feminist-informed strategies that can be utilized as potential resources for supporting Black women's mental health. These strategies are intended to contextualize Black women's mental health as an essential component of Black feminism, as well as draw attention to Black feminist thought as essential to understanding and positively impacting Black women's mental health.

Mental Health Strategies Informed by Black Feminist Thought

Practicing Essential/Critical Affirmations

The use of critical affirmations is the first Black feminist strategy to aid in enhancing the mental health of Black women. In *Sisters of the Yam Black Women and Self-Recovery*, bell hooks discusses how affirmations can be used as a technique to aid in the self-healing process for Black women (21). She explains how Black women often grapple with a "harsh, abusive, and critical internal voice" due to either childhood experiences with oppressive authority figures or continuous navigation of systems that attempt to control the ways in which we perceive ourselves (Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam* 28). The content of our internal voice is influenced by external forces, and if left unchecked, it can negatively impact our psychological well-being and our ability to develop a healthy self-conceptualization. For example, constant implicit messages of Blackness being equated to inferiority may subconsciously lead Black women to believe that we must work two times harder to prove our worth and credibility. This over exertion affects our physical and mental health and impacts our self-perception. Beliefs of "Black women being less than" are often subconsciously internalized, which results in us altering our behavior in attempt to fight against these false narratives (West et al. 391). The internalization of these lies does not mean we agree with them, but it is a recognition that this narrative is deemed as a truth for others – and we respond. However, responding can often adversely affect Black women's physical health, psychological well-being, and self-perception (West et al. 391).

West et al. suggest we instead must "consider the systems, structures, and power dynamics at play" to prevent internalization of these lies and self-blaming (391).

According to hooks, "Black women's survival is often [conflated] as our ability to [navigate] negative critique and punishment" (Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam* 28). Although the ability to navigate detrimental systems aids in physical preservation, Black women's mental health is negatively affected due to the excessive amount of cognitive energy dedicated toward protection, rather than toward developing a "gentle, compassionate, and caring inner voice" (Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam* 28). To change this automatic and routine pattern, Black women must begin practicing "critical" affirmations. hooks emphasized the term "critical," meaning crucial, necessary, or key, because she held that affirming existence as Black women is an essential component to Black women's survival (Hooks, *Sisters of the Yam* 27). Examples of potential affirmations for Black women are listed below; these affirmations are a compilation of quotes from several texts written by Black women.

> "I embrace the idea of love as a transformative force" (Hooks, *All About Love* 6).
>
> "I am committed to doing the necessary groundwork for self-love and self-esteem" (Hooks, *All About Love* 60).
>
> "My safe place is in my gratitude" (Angelou 150).
>
> "When the burden becomes too much to bear, I can release it" (Stone 48).
>
> "I release traumatic memories, the emotional energy connected with them, and the faulty belief system resulting from [them]" (Richardson and Wade 1).

Affirmative statements, particularly in response to oppressive systems and related negative internal voices, can play a pivotal role in shifting how Black women perceive themselves. There is power in the use of words. When Black women speak, they have the power to engage in self-healing, to manifest potential into existence, and actively deny false narratives regarding lived experiences. However, it must be noted that affirmations alone cannot constitute healing. In agreement with Collins, affirmation of the self needs to be coupled with the ability to recognize how "stereotypes function as problematic controlling images" (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 114). Practicing affirmations without this ability, or without a self-defined Black consciousness, results only in "replacing negative images with positive ones," rather than consciously understanding how these images function and manifest in the daily lives of Black women (Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* 114).

Raising Black Consciousness

A strong Black consciousness is the source that fuels our ability to affirm ourselves. To develop the strength of Black consciousness, a person needs to intentionally engage in consciousness raising (Kambon 20). Many scholars, theorists, practitioners, and psychologists have researched distinct ways of increasing consciousness and racial identity among Black people. The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), a grassroots activist movement that began in South Africa in the 1960s, can be used to illustrate potential ways of increasing consciousness (Morgan 1124). Leaders of the BCM utilized several strategies to increase Black awareness and consciousness among the groups they aimed to engage. Three of their strategies will be discussed.

First, the leaders were intentional about framing education as "a community resource rather than a means of personal advancement" (Morgan 1130). They understood that having access to education was a privilege and should be used to benefit Black people and to further the Black agenda. Reframing the utility of education can aid in shifting the ways that Black people navigate academia, and potentially increase their willingness to use it as a means of freedom, rather than a means of career advancement. Engaging in Black studies courses, finding Black mentorship, and participating in Black centered activities are all potential ways of increasing Black consciousness (Kambon 50). The BCM leaders also emphasized "linking politics of empowerment with people's everyday struggles" (Morgan 1131). This philosophy closely aligns with ideology of Black Feminist thought that "the personal is political" (Springer 1059). Using Black lived

experiences to ground activism aids in creating a collective shared Black consciousness, in which people actively work together to dismantle intersecting oppressions. Finally, intentional utilization of language was a strategy for consciousness raising among the BCM leaders. For instance, the leaders intentionally converted "Black from a stigma to a category of pride" (Morgan 1137). Using intentional language also contributes to the goal of engaging in essential/critical affirmations to continuously affirm Black existence.

The BCM used three strategies to raise consciousness among their targeted groups: (1) reframing education's primary utility, (2) viewing lived experience and politics as interconnected systems, and (3) using language intentionally. Similar techniques can be used in efforts to raise Black consciousness among Black women, with the ultimate goal of improved mental health.

Intentional Self-Definition

Recognizing the power of self-definition is the last Black feminist-informed strategy for addressing Black women's mental health. This strategy is intimately intertwined with Black positive essential affirmations as affirmation of the self needs to be coupled with the ability to define the self. Collins states that a "self-defined Black women's consciousness" is a hidden space in Black women that allows them to affirm, cope, and "transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions" (*Black Feminist Thought* 98). It is through this consciousness that Black women are enabled to understand the institutional structures in place that disadvantage them, dismantle racist ideologies, and construct self-definitions of Black womanhood. Black people can define themselves by grounding knowledge and values in a collective Black consciousness. According to Black psychologists, Baldwin, Duncan, and Bell a collective Black consciousness is one that consists of "[a] positive Black identity, pro- Black beliefs, attitudes, priorities, awareness, and knowledge [of Black culture and history]" (28). Essentially, by garnering a sufficient understanding of the ways Black people have cultivated new knowledge since the beginning of time, historically resisted inhumane treatment, and reframed racist tropes, Black people are able to break free from the bondage of whiteness. Whiteness not as a person, but as a developed construct that has attempted to dehumanize Black bodies, Black labor, and Black relationships. For our mental, physical, and spiritual survival it is imperative to reclaim individual and collective agency, tap into the collective Black consciousness of truth, and actively recognize that Black people have the power to self-define.

According to Black psychologists, Sellers et al., Black people can be categorized as having different levels of consciousness ("Multidimensional Inventory" 808). He created a psychological measure to empirically assess consciousness by analyzing the significance one places on their racial identity (Sellers et al., "Multidimensional Inventory" 808). Racial identity is a construct that examines the role race plays in African American's self-conceptualization (Sellers et al., "Racial Identity" 188). This measure, the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI), allows for differential indication of racial identity among Black people. Research has supported the theory that pro-Black attitudes can positively affect psychological well-being. Example items from the MIBI include "Overall, being Black has very little to do with how I feel about myself; It is important for Black people to surround their children with Black art, music and literature; I am happy that I am Black; I have a strong sense of belonging to Black People" (Sellers et al., "Racial Identity" 188). A person's score on the MIBI can help to illuminate their current state regarding racial identity and related Black consciousness with higher scores, indicating a greater significance the individual places on being Black. The MIBI is an example of a potential resource for mental health professionals who operate from an Afrocentric perspective that can facilitate the self-knowledge and self-definition process. However, it is important to note that one limitation of the MIBI is that it does not utilize an intersectional approach when examining Black mental health experiences. We encourage practitioners to take into consideration the unique experiences of Black women when working toward self-definition. One scale that measures the potential psychological impacts of racism and sexism in the lives of Black women is the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black women (Lewis and Nevile 289). Although this resource does not directly speak toward the self-definition process, it can help illuminate how negative experiences

impact Black women's psychological well-being and can be used to think about intersecting areas of self-knowledge and self-definition.

Mental health professionals can also be instrumental in guiding Black clients toward resources and external support that can aid in increasing their Black consciousness such as studying Black historical texts, documentaries, attending Historically Black Colleges or Universities, and intentionally asserting themselves in culturally affirming spaces. Fostering a Black person's ability to self-define and increase their level of Black consciousness should allow for the mitigation of negative psychological outcomes like internalized self-hatred, higher levels of anxiety, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms (Helms and Carter 447).

Conclusion

In the field of Psychology, there is a general deficiency of culturally informed research, theory, or interventions. More specifically, the linkage between Black feminist scholarship and psychological theory, research, or intervention is dismal. A perusal of work from prominent Black feminist thinkers reveals the importance of mental health and the necessity to protect the mind from the negative impact of an oppressive society. Psychological scientist and mental health providers should actively work to incorporate Black feminist thought into mental health theory, research, and interventions.

While three Black feminist-informed mental health strategies were suggested, a considerable amount of similar types of work is essential. Research on the psychological impact of practicing essential/critical affirmations, intentional self-definition, and raising Black consciousness is crucial. Additional research is needed to analyze the distinct ways Black feminists, Black practitioners, and Black interdisciplinary scholars increase Black consciousness to aid Black people in dismantling oppressive systems in their lives and support their mental health. A new generation of Black feminists is called upon to intentionally center Black women's mental health in psychological research and therapeutic practices.

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