Toward a Black Psychology of Leisure: An 'Akbarian' Critique

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Abstract

There are a number of institutions posited as vestibules for maintaining and reinforcing rituals and celebrations of African consciousness (i.e., education, religion, arts, etc.). The one that does not readily come to mind, however, is leisure (i.e., organized sport and physical activity). Leisure is salient to African Americans and is the terrain by which their personal and social identities are often nurtured. Ironically, leisure also represents a cultured space where racial oppression abounds, and is therefore often a contested space for African Americans. This essay offers a critique of the emancipatory properties of leisure through the lenses of Na'im Akbar's African-centered paradigm, via the tenets of self-knowledge (e.g., racial-self affirmation) and collective liberation (e.g., spiritual rhythm and racial kinship). It demonstrates how (at the individual/micro level) African Americans may engage in constitutive and regulatory leisure practices that enlarge their spiritual, experiential, and perceptual spheres of freedom, thereby allowing them some control over the nature and quality of their leisure experiences. In so doing, this essay elucidates the 'Black Psychology' that undergirds African Americans' leisure pursuits.

Akbar and African/Black Liberation Psychology

"African-Americans represent the most extreme examples of victims of human oppression and would be the most appropriate group on which to demonstrate a liberation psychology" (Akbar, 1984, p. 404).

Akbar (1984) lamented the negative assertions, disparaging ethnocentric assumptions, and 'uncritical acceptance' of Western science by African people. He avowed the need for an emerging paradigm with a 'natural fit' that was culturally constituted from an African worldview, was respective of a spiritual consciousness, and had the ability to elucidate self-affirming patterns. Consequently, Akbar was among the pioneering scholars who helped to usher in the legitimacy and vibrancy of an African/Black Psychology as a system of thought predicated on indigenous African philosophy, definitions, procedures, and practices. The fundamental premise of African/Black psychology is the celebration and affirmation of the cultural ethos and traditions that imbue and empower the African spirit. It is one that reflects a system of knowledge concerning the nature of the social universe from the perspective of the African worldview (Kambon, 1998). It is a way of thinking that organizes, celebrates, and affirms Blackness in all aspects of one's life (Belgrave & Alison, 2010).

It represents a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality. It is how someone makes sense of their world and their experiences-it determines which events are meaningful and which are not and provides the process by which those events are made harmonious with their lives (Butler, 1992, p. 29).

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Myers (2009) attested that it represents cultural congruence and the authenticity of being grounded in an African-centered frame of reference. As Akbar (2003) summarized: "African psychology is not a thing but a place – a view, a perspective, a way of observing" (p. ix)... "an intellectual 'emancipation proclamation' of the liberation of Black thought (p. xiii).

Akbar (2003) also discussed various institutional forces for maintaining and perpetuating the elements of African-centered paradigms and models that seek to liberate and advance humanity. Among the institutions listed were: (a) educational institutions (offering content to advance self knowledge), (b) economic institutions (to address critical survival needs), and (c) religious institutions (to foster spirituality and enhance a collective development). Akbar contended that these modalities 'augment and institutionalize' the African American paradigm. Other vestibules for maintaining and reinforcing the African consciousness are religious celebrations, rituals, memorials, museums, books, etc. (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2009). What was missing from the list of modalities mentioned by Akbar was the institution of leisure. What was missing from the list of rituals and celebrations offered by Kambon and Bowen-Reid was symbolic leisure consumption. However, individuals want freedom from social, cultural, economic, and psychological constraints and restrictions, and many African Americans seek leisure for such respite. Therefore, the purpose of this essay is to explicate the elements of freedom in leisure for African Americans, from an Afrocentric perspective as espoused by Akbar.

Leisure...A Pursuit of Psychological Freedom

Leisure (in the context of this essay) is a broad and collective term to encompass a wide array of organized sports and physical activities. Such activities include but are not limited to: (a) attending sport events, (b) watching/consuming sports via media such as television, internet, or radio, or (c) participating in sports (scholastic, recreational, or otherwise), physical activity, or fitness related endeavors. Leisure pursuits are typically engaged in on a voluntary basis at the volition of the individual's desires and preferences, and they reflect one's physical, mental, spiritual, and social engagement in life (Joblin, 2009). Aitken (1976) indicated that there is an ethic of responsibility in leisure whereby people assess each situation (asking what is going on) and then determine what the most fitting and appropriate action is based on what they determine good and right. Indi-

viduals often use their cognitive, physical, and social skills in their desire for the intrinsic rewards leisure engagement offers (Iso-Ahola, 1997). Based on the aforestated research, it may be surmised that individuals are fulfilling a myriad of roles and responsibilities in their pursuit of leisure.

A central defining characteristic of leisure (i.e., organized sports and physical activity) is a sense of freedom (Iso-Ahola, 1997). Hemingway (1996) concluded just as Joblin (2009) did those individuals seek freedom and emancipation in their leisure pursuits. "When people experience leisure, their spirits soar and their humanity finds larger expression" (Dahl, 1972, p. 73). They want to express and affirm the free (emancipated) self that leisure activities bring to the fore. "In leisure individuals sample freedom, have the non-obligatory time to cultivate self-definition....Not only can people actualize their social, mental, and physical skills through leisure, but they can also come to understand more of their spiritual selves" (Schmidt & Little, 2007, p. 225). Sloan (1989), Wann (1995) and other researchers have also described the transcendent, ephemeral properties of leisure that allow individuals to release their inhibitions and to experience heightened feelings of euphoria (as they are situated in a moment of freedom that allows them to escape the stressors of their daily lives). The desire for such a feeling is one of the primary motives for leisure engagement.

According to Hemingway (1996), human activity such as leisure behavior consists of two sets of socially determined rules: (a) regulatory, which operate within practices to direct activity, and (b) constitutive, which define practices themselves by forming the boundaries between them and the rest of the world. In either case, although individuals' leisure behavior is influenced by structures and practices that either encourage or discourage their participation, individuals also have the power to ascribe meaning to the salience of such practices in a manner that allow them to define and direct the nature of their leisure experiences in pursuit of the psychological freedom leisure typically affords.

Leisure and the African American Community

It has been argued that sport (as a particular form of leisure as discussed at the outset) is: (a) a distinctive source of social cohesion within the African American community, and (b) a subcultural nuance and salient expressive sphere of 'Black' life (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1990). Edwards (1973; 2010) contended that the Afri-

can American culture places much emphasis on sports and physical skills, and tends to celebrate superior athletes as community heroes. Philipp (1995; 2000) opined likewise, as did Rudman (1986) who reported that African Americans are more likely to incorporate sport/leisure into their daily lives and are more likely to see the benefit of sport participation for the youth. Higher levels of sport avidity have been found among African Americans, in comparison to Whites (Kaplan &Lamm, 2000) and African Americans have reportedly been more likely than Caucasians to use leisure for a cathartic and psychological escape (Bilyeu & Wann, 2002), leading to the supposition that freedom and emancipation in leisure are particularly salient to African Americans. Therefore, not only do the unique and fundamental attributes, properties, and functions of leisure make it a viable entity by which to examine the application and implications of African/Black Psychology in general, but it is an institution with a symbolic appeal to African Americans.

Steinfeldt, Reed, & Steinfeldt (2010) professed that leisure is "an area for ... racial resistance, a contested racial terrain wherein African Americans define themselves and the relationship of their race within society at large" (pg. 4). They further contend that racial identities are either nurtured or hindered in the leisure domain. Notwithstanding the reported salience of the self-defining properties of leisure to the African American community, the institution of leisure has not been very welcoming to its Black consumers. Philipp (2002) proclaimed that, "Unfortunately, even though signs marked 'Whites Only' and 'Colored Only' have been removed from leisure places, racialized spatial relations continue to exist in many leisure places in the United States" (p. 123). Moreover, the perceptions of the racial 'character' of leisure settings and activities are apparently not lost on its African American consumers/participants as most African Americans are mindful of leisure situations where they are welcome (Philipp, 1995; 1999; West, 1989).

Permeations of prejudice and discrimination determine their leisure choices and their perceptions of settings where they 'fit' and 'don't fit' (Philipp, 1999). For example, due to racist ideologies among leisure participants and racially exclusive organizational culture and practices that pervade leisure settings, African Americans may feel more of a natural fit while participating at a neighborhood fitness facility than they would while playing golf at a predominately Caucasian golf course. Fitting in has also long been a challenge for African Americans sport attendees. Hoose (1989), Evans (2001), and Staples (1987) offered historical accounts of the incidents of racism African American fans were subjected to while attending professional sport events (namely professional baseball). Such discrimination included African Americans being relegated to entering sport stadia in the 'Blacks only' gates, drinking from the 'Blacks only' fountains, using the 'Blacks only' restrooms, purchasing food only from 'Black' vendors and tickets from 'Black' ticket windows. Additionally, a brick wall served as a structural barrier that physically separated Black fans from Caucasian fans. These images and practices promoted racially demoralizing experiences for Black fans that discouraged their sport event attendance and adversely affected their sport consumption desires.

Thus, While some leisure experiences may serve as venues for racial/ethnic interaction and a platform for racial/ethnic retention for African Americans, under certain circumstances (Stodolska, Marcinkowski, & Yi-Kook, 2007), in other instances leisure activities and settings are 'racialized' in a manner such that they are perceived to be and are assigned labels of 'Black' and 'White' (Lee, 1972). Consequently, the quality of leisure opportunities and experiences - both in the production (i.e., participant level) and consumption thereof (i.e., the spectator level) is often filtered through racial vestiges (Coakley, 2007; Evans, 2001). Therefore, the racial ambience and racial cues emitted in leisure settings may either invite or exclude the participation among certain racial/ethnic groups.

As this essay has articulated, the overt and covert racism in leisure (i.e., organized sport, recreation, and physical activity), along with the historical racial discrimination and segregation in leisure has summarily affected African Americans' contemporary leisure preferences and behaviors (Armstrong, 2007). The prevalence of racism that often restricts the enjoyment of leisure for many African Americans beckons an answer to the questions posed by Hemmingway (1996): (a) what sort of freedom is actually achievable in contemporary leisure, and (b) to what extent are the social roles established in leisure truly emancipating? Hemmingway's (1996) questions provide the background query and impetus for this essay and will be explored using the paradigm, assertions, and propositions espoused by Akbar.

...Toward a Black Psychology of Leisure: An 'Akbarian' Critique

"The principle, which must guide African American research, must be an objective of

self-knowledge and collective liberation." (Akbar, 2003, p. 33).

As discussed previously, Akbar proclaimed the need for an African-centered paradigm. Such approach would: (a) offer a conceptual framework that would make African Americans the subject (rather than the object) of any such analyses, and (b) would move African Americans from the periphery to the center of a spiritually liberating analysis. Two interrelated concepts or theoretical strips of Akbar's African-centered model that may elucidate the expansive and liberating qualities of leisure for African Americans and unrestrict their bounded spaces and racialized realities as leisure consumers are: (a) self-knowledge and (b) collective liberation.

Self-Knowledge

A core principle of Akbar's conceptualization of the African/Black Psychology paradigm is self (i.e., self-presentation, self-implication, self-affirmation, self-verification, and self-validation). Akbar posited the African-centered self as critical to the psychological functioning of people of African descent. Akbar (1985) stated: "Knowing ourselves is a fundamental aspect of assuming personal power and effectiveness (p. 24). He continued that "self discovery is the fuel for exploration, scholarship, and all of the pursuits that guide our actions..." (p. 30). An understanding of self is also critical to leisure behavior based on the widespread beliefs that: (a) leisure contributes to the self-development and self-realization process (Haggard & Williams, 1992) and (b) leisure are reflexive activities and identity relevant behaviors that allow for purposeful expressions and performances of salient self-identities (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007). Consequently, leisure activities are often more than merely games to play for African Americans but are salient means of defining their 'self' (Bimper & Harrison, 2011).

The prevalent focus of construals of self (as an antecedent or consequence of behaviors) in leisure research has typically been located and positioned along the lines of the social-self and psychological-self because it has been presumed that individuals generally are engaged in leisure to reinforce pleasures that fulfill social and/or psychological needs (Robinson & Trail, 2005; Sloan, 1989). Consequently, there has been an emergence and plethora of social and psychological theories, models, and paradigms to explain leisure behaviors (Funk,

Ridinger, & Moorman, 2004) with the presumption that they are applicable to African Americans even though they fail to include race or acknowledge the racial-self. Akbar (1980) declared the need for the study of the racial/'Black' self. He essentialized a consciousness of oppression at the root of the African-centered self and contended: "The self study will generate theory from an appreciation of the culture and history of Black people and will supply new concepts and instruments for observation" (p. 47). Alcoff (1999) corroborated Akbar's contentions and insisted that, "refusing the reality of racial categories as elements within our current social ontology only exacerbates racism because it helps to conceal the myriad effects that racializing practices have had and continue to have on social life..."(p. 32).

Although not characterized as such, evidence of Akbar's claim of an operative interdependent racial-self at the core of the psychological functioning of African Americans abound in leisure. For instance, Harrison (1995) discussed how the existence of a racial self-schema (i.e., the cognitive generalizations of self based on racial aesthetics) influences African Americans' involvement in leisure. Hibbler and Shinew (2002) also inferred the salience of racial-self to leisure in their discussion of how some leisure activities are a more important part of the identity formation and affirmation of some African Americans such that they are (perceptually) assigned the label of 'Black' and others are assigned the label of 'White.' According to Harrison and Moore (2007), African Americans are likely to seek out "'Black sport' or physical activities that connect the individual with 'Blackness'...to completely immerse themselves in 'Blackness'" (p. 249).

Sapolsky (1980) revealed that African Americans had a positive affect (i.e., racial regard) and favorable affinity to racial similarity in their disposition to want to watch Black athletes being successful. More evidence of an operative racial-self ideology was offered by Armstrong and Stratta (2004) who reported that African Americans' leisure reflected an ideology and pattern of 'racially conspicuous' consumption such that they seemed to make concerted efforts to participate in racial self affirming sport opportunities and experiences. For example, they reported that: (a) African Americans' sport event attendance was higher in the Southern market (an environment with a pronounced African American population) than it was in the comparison Midwest market (an environment with a minimal Black population); (b) sport events featuring predominately Black athletes and coaches competing had higher concentrations of African American spectators than did

the comparison sport events featuring majority Caucasian athletes and coaches competing; and (c) African Americans' attendance was highest for sport events that featured a majority of African American spectators and was lowest for events that featured a majority of Caucasian spectators. These findings illustrated the salience of interdependent properties of self-reflective 'Blackness' to African Americans' leisure behaviors and evidenced their concerted efforts to engage in leisure activities that afforded them preferred/alternative conceptions, representations, and affirmations of their 'Black/racialed' self.

Collective Liberation

The second tenet of Akbar's paradigm that is relevant to African American's leisure pursuits is that of collective liberation. It is evidenced in two concepts: spiritual rhythm and racial kinship.

Spiritual Rhythm. Akbar (1975) noted that one way collective liberation is achieved from an African-centered perspective is through spirituality or an African-centered rhythm. Bellgrave and Allison (2010) characterized the spiritual substance of Akbar's African-centered model as 'reflecting a deeper inner sense of self'. Belgrave and Allison indicated that "spiritness is a concept whose meaning is to be full of life – to have a mind, soul, energy, and passion. From an Afrocentric perspective, spirit is both real and symbolic and is the divine spark that makes humans who they are" (p. 43). Kambon and Bowen-Reid (2009) also summarizes the basis Akbar's African-centered paradigm/worldview as one characterized by a salient spiritual substance reflecting a deep inner sense of self that unites the African person with everything else in the universe. Williams (1981) indicated that the conceptual soul-feeling is an element of 'naturalness' unique to individuals of African descent, and he defined naturalness as unlearned Black specific behavior such as spirituality and rhythm. Belgrave and Allison referred to this spiritual dimension as verve and rhythm. They posited verve as the improvisational style among African Americans, and rhythm as the recurring pattern of behavior that gives energy and meaning to experiencing the external environment.

Such spiritual rhythm (in its varied nomenclatures) is relevant to leisure. For instance, it is likely that African American spectators' motivation to see Black athletes perform during athletic competitions (Armstrong, 2007) is based on the Afrocentric style (verve and rhythm) that is witnessed in certain sport events and physical activities. Andrews (1976) alluded to a distinct spiritual rhythm among African peoples and subscribes to the concept of Afrocentricity in leisure as depicted in his reflection of its parent discipline of kinesiology – which is the study of movement, and is the core element of sport and physical activity. Andrews asserted: "To know African people is to understand Black movement and parts of the body, soul, brain, color, etc...." (pg.1). The Afrocentricity of kinesiology is the focus of Andrew's poem that summarizes the concept of the 'psychoblackology' and rhythm and African aesthetic of Blacks' sport/athletic performances:

> Tomorrow will be a Blacker day in sports, dance, drama, and all African expression in America. The spirit of Blackness is creativity in motion. The purest and most healthy bodies are those who love movement the most. African movement form is living form...going through rhythmic soul changes. The whole body is in tune with the rhythmic process, the characteristic unity of world Black life. The critical turn on the track, that bad move in basketball, or that movement in gymnastics and other sports that represents soul action, taking place in a sort of a trance where the Brother or Sister's ...guides their bodies to super marks and scores undreamed by mental principles. This summary of Blackness in kinesiology, sports, and physical education is the truth .... African-American kinesiology has a reality of its own which is more important than its physical existence. It is the embodiment of a system of thought in styling manifestations that make moving an art where the move, the motion makes, is determine by artistic thinking rather than by a principle of scientific exemplar or sports arch type of the mind. African tradition in dance reveals that African kinetics transforms from within.... No matter what size, shape, or who you are, man, woman, all are of the community and caught up in the spirit of the activity....So every Black action is a work of art in sports, and , if classified may be fundamentally (1) the visual-African Brother or sister jes standing there ready to play; and (2) psychoblackology kinesiology-the action....But the clearest way.... for Americans to understand and appreciate African motion is through a knowledge of the cohesive and segregating forces of Black song, music, drama, art, poetry, life, and the spirits which determines the kinetics..." (pg. 39-40).

Nelson George (1992) described the spiritual

rhythm of the Black aesthetic and its particular influence on contemporary style of play exhibited in basketball. He metaphorically equated the kinesthetic movements (style and tempo) of African American basketball players to the spontaneous and impromptu rhythms displayed by Black jazz and rap musicians. Similarly, Appiah (2000) also discussed the 'cultural markings' of the sport of basketball and equated the rhythm of basketball to jazz and hip-hop. The fascination with the unique rhythm of the 'Black aesthetic' (Welsh-Asante, 1993) may explain Blacks' overrepresentation as producers (i.e., participants) and consumers (i.e., spectators) of the sport of basketball (Armstrong, 2007; Coakley, 2007). The kinesthetics of African American athletes' performances offer a literal and figurative depiction of the racial balance, harmony, spirit, and underlying rhythm inherent in Akbar's African-centered paradigm that engenders a racial/Black collective. Such rhythm is also displayed in the vibrancy of the overt actions and behaviors of African American spectators at many Historically Black College and University (HBCU) sport events, reflecting a deeper inner sense of their racial self. Not only are such individuals liberated by being transformed from within, but the visual display of such African-centered rhythm also transforms the HBCU consumption setting (stadia and arenas) such that the jubilations and the harmonious spirited release of 'leisured' emotions dance to the rhythm of a collective nonverbal 'hallelujah!' These are just a few illustrations of the spiritual rhythm in leisure that promotes, facilitates, and ensures a collective liberation for African Americans.

Racial Kinship

According to Akbar (2003), African/Black Psychology recognizes the uniqueness of the individual self as a component of the collective self, and conceptualizes self as a collective phenomenon. Thus, another way individuals experience collective liberation is through Akbar's notion of an African-centered communal or racial kinship; one in which individuals seek to establish a harmonious relationship to the larger African American community. The positioning of the African-centered self as racial communal is based on the proposition: I am because we are; and because we are therefore I am (Mbiti, 1970). Harris (1998) indicated similarly and contended that an Afrocentric orientation asserts that consciousness (defined as the way in which individuals think about and behave relative relationships to self,

others, nature, and some superior idea or Being) determines being. Rajiv (1992) also maintained that while the White concept of self can exist independent of the White community, the Black self-concept is deeply entrenched in the collective experience of their racial community.

The concept that approximates the premise of the collective of communal/racial kinship described by Akbar in leisure is the concept of racial enclave or ethnic enclosures (Stodolska et al., 2007). The fundamental tenet of racial/ethnic enclosures is that there is a tendency for underrepresented ethnic groups to maintain social networks primarily within their own ethnic group. Moreover, such ethnic networks: (a) can strengthen solidarity within an ethnic group; (b) may serve as a stress-relieving mechanism for individuals whose professional lives are restricted to or occur in predominately White or mainstream environments; (c) may provide a coping mechanism for those who experience a significant level of discrimination in mainstream professional settings; (d) help to build social capital (of people and the community); (e) are likely to play a role in the process of achievement of individuals from underrepresented ethnic groups; (f) improve relationships between members of ethnic groups; and (g) are used as resources to facilitate leisure. As the last item indicated, racial/ethnic enclosures in leisure settings typically enlarge and encourage ethnic related behaviors and consequently serve as a safe space of freedom and liberation.

The HBCU sport experience previously discussed offers a stark example of Akbar's notion of liberation through the African-centered/racial communal. While African Americans are noticeably absent from most professional and major college sport events, their attendance at many HBCU events have occurred in record breaking numbers (Armstrong, 2007). Notably, HBCUs create leisure environments in which the salience of the group identity of people of African descent is created, celebrated, affirmed, and reinforced. Burwell (1993) described HBCU sports as a "radical cultural departure" (p. 5C) from mainstream sports, and "an Ebony Fashion Fair...Soul Train...a country revival and a family reunion all set to the funky tempo and sultry gyrations of Black college marching bands and dance teams" (p. 5C). As such, the gestalt of the HBCU experience offers a unique level of felt ethnicity and situational ethnicity (Staymen & Deshpande, 1986) that creates a social network and racial 'kinship' among the African Americans in the respective environment (and one that is not typically duplicated in mainstream sport arenas/

stadiums) that positively influence African Americans' leisure consumption. Moreover, many of the attendees have no formal affiliation with HBCUS (i.e., they are not students, faculty, or alumnae), but are attracted to the racial kinship the events offer.

Concerning the non-HBCU sport experience, Bilyeu and Wann (2002) revealed that a racial kinship or feeling of being culturally and racially represented was an important reason for African American students to watch, read, or discuss sports in general. The African-American students interviewed by Bilyeu and Wann felt that supporting certain teams and players translated into supporting their culture and players who have overcome racial obstacles. Thus, as these findings evidence, the salience communal Blackness (the feeling of the representation, unity, and oneness of being with or connecting to other Blacks) and racial kinship discussed by Akbar (2003) offer a collective liberation for African Americans during their leisure pursuits (be they tethered to HBCUs or otherwise).

'Emancipating Leisure'

"...We have a need to gain consciousness and only in consciousness is our true human capacity open to us." Na'im Akbar

"Human beings are equipped with what they need to do and once they are stirred with that realization, there are no barriers." Na'im Akbar

Hemmingway (1996) asserted that the magnitude of freedom an individual experiences during their leisure pursuits is directly proportional to the degree to which the individual can control spiritual, experiential, and perceptual conditions that govern and influence their leisure experiences and responses. However, Jenkins (2004) lauded African Americans' ability to adjust and direct their behaviors to avoid oppression and control their self-presentation - even under the most oppressive situations. This essay supported the contentions of Jenkins and Hemmingway and demonstrated how (at the individual/micro level) African Americans may engage in constitutive and regulatory practices (as demonstrated in their selective leisure preferences and behaviors) that enlarge their spiritual, experiential, and perceptual spheres of freedom, thereby allowing them some control of the nature of their leisure experiences.

In so doing, it illustrated a fundamental element of the Afrocentric psyche - the agency of African Americans. That is, their conscious awareness of the "mechanisms of domination and their apparatuses of marginalization" (Exkano, 2012, p. 66) that pervades leisure, and yet their ability to act independently of such oppressive contexts (Exkano) allowing their recovery, celebration, and emancipation (as Akbar professed).

As mentioned previously, individuals do not passively accept a given identity, rather they engage in a lifelong process of choosing to participate in activities that cultivate preferred identities. Utilizing theoretical strips of Akbar's paradigm of African/Black Psychology illustrates how African Americans leisure consumption may reflect a symbolic and ritual process (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). The trends and patterns highlighted here reveal how African Americans' may actively cultivate their racialed identity and their African-centered ethos, personality, and consciousness as leisure participants. Insightfully, Akbar's African-centered Psychology offered concurrent answers to the questions posed at the outset that guided this conversation. Concerning the question of what type of freedom is achievable in leisure for African Americans, the results suggested that (under the auspices of African-centered variables of racial aesthetics of self and Blackness, spiritual rhythm, and racial kinship), African Americans may utilize certain leisure experiences as a means of racial liberation, affirmation, and psychological centeredness. Regarding the question of where the spheres of freedom and emancipation are in leisure for African American participants, a view through the lenses of Akbar's African-centered paradigm suggests that African Americans may find freedom based on congruent self-construals and artifacts in the racial ascriptions of the product and the racial comfort created by the ethnic enclosures and racial enclaves that include other African Americans in the leisure setting (Armstrong & Stratta, 2004). Lastly, Staples (1987) asked the question: Where are the Black sport fans? Through the lenses of Akbar's African-centered paradigm, we may surmise that they are seeking and partaking in racially self-affirming leisure opportunities.

The unique insights gleaned from this essay, and the plausible responses to the questions regarding freedom in leisure for African Americans are noteworthy. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the greater need for freedom to exist at the institutional/macro level regarding leisure and the African American community. African Americans cannot truly be 'free' and the spirit of emancipation and psychological liberation as espoused by Akbar cannot be fully celebrated

until the perils of racial oppression that pervade the institution of leisure (such as the physical exploitation of African American athletes, distorted racial images and narratives of leisure participants that attack the African/ Black psyche, and the socially irresponsible comodification and commercialization of Blackness for profit, to name a few) are eradicated. Herein lies the charge and challenge of future Afrocentric critiques of leisure.

Conclusion

Black people in America have a much greater inner power than they realize, but they must re-discover themselves in order to use it. Naim Akbar

Using an 'Akbarian' critique allowed for a re-discovery of the prominence of race as an organizing principle of the psychological functioning that directs African Americans' leisure behaviors. As Akbar opined, Black psychology (as an African-centered frame of reference) offered an intellectual space by which to: (a) elucidate the self-affirming patterns for African Americans in leisure, (b) celebrate cultural ethos in leisure that empower the African spirit, and (c) demonstrate how leisure can be a harmonious process for African-Americans. It revealed an underlying psyche and consciousness of the power and control by African Americans to direct the nature of their leisure experiences. In so doing, it offered a racially-centered perspective for framing the narratives depicting the 'Black psychology' of leisure consumption. Moreover, it illustrated how leisure linked to spirituality can be transformative (as Joblin, 2009 indicated) such that African Americans' leisure experiences have evolved from being historically marked by discrimination to being inspired by contemporary affirmation. Using tenets of an African-centered framework as conceived by Akbar to interrogate the nuances of leisure support the consideration/inclusion of leisure among the social institutions that may: (a) promote a racialed euphoria, (b) situate African Americans in symbolic moments of racial connectedness, and (c) allow African Americans to express their emancipated selves.

Kambon & Bowen-Reid (2009) indicated that "no research has been associated with Akbar's model per se" (p. 63); however, as excavated throughout this essay, there is a plethora of empirical confirmations of the tenets espoused by Akbar. Without the backdrop of an African-centered framework (of which racial centrality/ Afrocentric consciousness is germane to its core), our understanding of the meaning, vitality, richness, and integrity of African Americans' leisure behaviors is 'incarcerated' and our vision of their leisure behaviors is a distorted unreality. Such Afrocentric omission would contour the essence of African Americans' control over volitional behaviors (such as leisure), and obscure the emancipatory properties of their symbolic actions. This essay paid homage to the intellectual brilliance of Dr. Na'im Akbar, and his vigilance to liberate the Black mind via self-knowledge and corrective and collective spirituality. Moreover, it offered a testament to the relevance and contributions of an African-centered epistemology as a guide through which to maneuver the intellectual journey of understanding how and why race (and racial identity) influence African Americans' behaviors (be they leisure or otherwise).

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