

²⁵S.R. Levitan et al. *Minorities in the United States: Problems, Progress, and Prospects*. (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1975).

²⁶B.M. Rosen and I.D. Goldberg. "Drug Abuse Reported for Patients Seen in Psychiatric Facilities in Maryland." (Washington D.C.: National Institute for Mental Health, Mimeograph, 1972).

²⁷McNeil. Op. cit., 44.

²⁸James Comer. "Black Suicide: A Hidden Crisis." *Urban Health*. (1973).

²⁹Kramer, Rosen, and Willis. Op. cit., 439.

³⁰Thomas Pettigrew. "Racism and the Mental Health of White Americans." *Racism and Mental Health*. B. Kramer and B. Brown, eds. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

Critique

Shirley Vining Brown's "Symbolic Interaction and Black Mental Health: Understanding Black Self Conceptions" presents significant and vital information concerning the effects of negative self-concepts on black Americans. The most interesting aspect of the paper is the development of the concept of "negative belief systems." She posits the belief that others, especially white psychologists and sociologists, are the defining agents of Black Culture, ethnicity, and identity. That is, blacks who believe these negative constructs experience mental health disorders: drug addiction, schizophrenia, alcoholism, and hypertension are examples. Buried negative beliefs about "self," in accordance with social injustices in economics and politics, provide the framework for black mental health problems. Negative beliefs about "self," according to Brown, are evidenced by increased black mental health disorders.

Brown's essay is enlightening as she unfolds the dilemma: blacks are systematically reinforced with negative self concepts and they are denied adequate coping mechanisms for handling negative beliefs which result in significant "mental disorders." Her paper lays the basic groundwork for focusing the problems. However, Brown fails to provide solutions for the problems she illustrates.

Blacks need to define themselves. In defining themselves, blacks must formulate concepts which are useful to themselves; blacks must take responsibility for their own realities. A positive belief system might be one method for eradicating negative beliefs perpetrated by white psychologists and sociologists. For example, an avenue open for exploration is the methods used to train psychologists and psychiatrists. The criteria used in most training programs for defining mental health problems is based on a "white" or monocultural model. Exploring mental health within a black cultural framework, better yet, within a multicultural framework, would increase the awareness of those trained in mental health services for understanding what a mental health problem is from a variety of perspectives. Mental health agents need to understand that categories which are normally used for "white" mental health disorders are unsuitable for blacks.

The possibilities are endless. The ideas presented in this critique provide further areas for exploring solutions to the problem Brown has addressed. Shirley Vining Brown has focused the problem, but she needs to explore viable solutions for the black Americans who have negative self images.

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Critique

Aside from the intrinsic merit of Dr. Shirley V. Brown's "Symbolic Interaction and Black Mental Health, . . ." the paper raises several important corollary issues that need extensive investigation: (1) the effects of one's self-concept upon how he or she views others; (2) the negligible effects of affirmative action programs; (3) the adverse effects of public school integration on blacks; (4) the validity of the assumption that schools in predominantly black neighborhoods are inherently inferior; and (5) the insidious notion that mainstreaming is both possible and desirable.

Probably all too few people realize that the images which they have of others are, in a large measure, the images which they have of themselves. The images that we have of ourselves and others are not independent but rather dependent. It is totally impossible for one to feel good about others without having a positive self-image. For