THE UBUNTU PARADIGM: PSYCHOLOGY’S NEXT FORCE?

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Summary

This article examines the need for the development of new paradigms within humanistic psychology that are less ethnocentric and individualistic. The underlying, yet often unacknowledged, commitment of humanistic psychology to the importance of “self in relation to others” is explored, along with a comparison of Western individualistic worldviews and those rooted in African humanism. This article advocates for the adoption of a new humanistic psychological paradigm based on the principles and values of the African collectivistic philosophy of Ubuntu. Finally, practical applications for the adoption of Ubuntu programming within treatment milieus, particularly child and adolescent residential treatment facilities, are presented as promising alternatives to presently utilized therapeutic modalities.

Keywords: Ubuntu; Ubuntu paradigm; humanistic psychology; sanctuary

Nearly two generations ago, disillusioned with what they perceived to be inadequacies of the prevailing behavioral and psychoanalytic approaches to psychology, Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and other progressive psychologists launched what was to become known as the “third force” of psychology—humanistic psychology. It was the goal of these early humanistic
psychologists to treat humans as more than ill beings consumed by neuroses, whose behaviors could be predicted by studying those of little white lab rats (Moss, 2001).

Not satisfied to accept these narrow, limiting, and predominantly pessimistic views of human nature, these pioneering psychologists saw the extraordinary beauty and boundless potential that is the human spirit, and they aspired to create a psychology that would acknowledge, embrace, celebrate, and enhance that spirit. Humanistic psychology grew out of their commitment to offer a more positive and affirming psychology that dismissed the "bad animal" paradigm of psychology in favor of one that allows for the complete expression of human potential. Myers (1993) wrote,

The humanists concern themselves with the human capacities and potentials that have no systematic place in behaviorist and psychoanalytic theory, e.g., creativity, self, growth, basic need-gratification, self-actualization, higher values, autonomy, identity, responsibility, psychological health. . . . Their aim is to present a more specific picture of the full range of possibilities inherent in the nature of humankind, and how those possibilities can be actualized. (p. 31)

Much has been written (Geller, 1982; Hillman, 1975) as to whether humanistic psychology has been able to successfully incorporate those original ideals into a working psychological model. Many (Garrison, 2001; Rowan, 2004; Wallis, 1985) would question whether the original philosophies of humanistic psychology have been diluted, fragmented, co-opted, and even replaced by other ideals such as transpersonal psychology and complementary therapies. Detractors could point to the continued popularity of cognitive behavioral models and psychoanalysis as indicators of humanistic psychology's failure to actualize its original promise. The scope of this article does not include debate of these beliefs but rather suggests that those of us who call ourselves humanistic psychologists and believe in the fundamental value, dignity, and potential of humans are now standing at a critical juncture. Complacent and afraid, we can choose to follow the masses in the direction of "traditional" psychology, or we can honor the vision of Maslow, May, and Rogers by blazing new paths and developing new paradigms firmly rooted in the humanistic dedication to the full expression of our humanness. If we are to be true to our convictions, that choice should be clear.

It is the intent of this article to argue that the psychological paradigms of the future will be found wrapped in the humanistic
philosophies of the past. Humanistic psychology is unique in that
by its very nature it dismisses the rigidity of “traditional” psy-
chology and not only allows for, but welcomes, new thoughts,
ideas, and directions. No other discipline has established itself on
the principle of being open (and welcoming) to the potentialities
of change.

Clearly, our world is rapidly and dramatically changing. Globalism, ecology, spirituality are all imposing unique demands
on the human condition (Aanstoos, 2003) that must be addressed
in ways that are effective, innovative, and perhaps even vision-
ary. As our world is evolving, so too must our psychologies.

Traditional psychologies have historically focused their energies
on asking the why. In the world of 2007, why is woefully inade-
quate. Humanistic psychology has always looked beyond the why
to contemplate the boundless potential of the why not. This is pre-
cisely the reason that psychology’s next force must spring from
the philosophical underpinnings of humanistic psychology. We
must build a modern, workable (and more importantly, humane
and just) psychology from within the traditions of humanism that
can be expanded and adapted to serve our increasingly global,
increasingly complex community. It is time for a humanistic
reformation that goes beyond a call for the opportunity to develop
individual potentialities and self-actualization. It is time for a
unifying psychology that recognizes cultural and societal potentialities and offers the opportunity for universal actualization. It
is once again time to ask, “Why not?”

LOST IN THE WORLD?

In many ways, mainstream Western psychology has not tran-
sceded the seminal traditions and practices of a century ago.
Consequently, psychology as a healing discipline has been lost in
the complexities of our world. This is exacerbated by the current
political climate in America that makes visionary advancements
in our discipline particularly difficult.

The ubiquity of managed care and HMOs has boxed us into a
medical model of care delivery, focused on stability and mainte-
nance and mathematical cost analyses as opposed to health and
healing. Our clinical clients are no longer unique individuals with
infinite potentialities. They have been reduced to finite numerical
codes of predictable behaviors as defined by the Diagnostic
and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), and our interactions have been limited to the number of sessions for which insurance is willing to pay. As therapists, we have begun to view our clients only from within the confines of their diagnoses, dehumanizing the person (and ourselves) along the way.

From a social psychological perspective, our American ethnocentrism and limited worldview have alienated us from the historical traditions of other cultures that could potentially offer insight and guidance into healthier, more holistic ways of being-in-the-world. We have not only turned our backs to these rich traditions, but in our infinite hubris have deemed them primitive and inconsequential.

We have isolated ourselves from the majority world psychologically, culturally, and spiritually. We have celebrated the resultant losses as a victory and affirmation of our world dominance and “superiority.” We have cultivated a culture that has refused to grow—as a nation and as a profession. And yet there remains a small contingent of contemporary American psychologists so disillusioned with existing psychological paradigms that they are working feverishly to develop new ones.

Not unlike the 1950s when humanistic psychology was launched as the “third force,” there now exists a cacophony of demand for a more complete and holistic unitary psychology. Humanistic psychology is evolving in dramatic, exciting, and globally relative and responsible ways. Interest in bodywork, dream work, and other alternate and complementary therapies has grown in recent years. Socially relevant paradigms are being proposed and explored. Schneider (2001) is calling for a return to romanticism. Pilisuk (Pilisuk & Parks, 1986; Pilisuk & Tennant, 1997) advocates a “healing web” of interconnection. Recently, Diaz-LaPlante (2007) has elucidated the need to embrace “the emancipatory goals of humanistic psychology” (p. 60) while developing a new humanistic paradigm that creates partnerships of healing and establishes a “clearly political humanistic psychology” (J. Diaz-LaPlante, personal communication, January 27, 2007).

Myers (1993) suggests an “optimal psychology” based on a holistic conceptual system utilizing Eastern philosophies and African folk beliefs. Multiculturalism, traditional wisdoms, and the holistic powers of communalism (Jenkins, 2001; Vontress & Epp, 2001) are being taught alongside self-actualization and human potential. Humanistic psychology is beginning to lead the way forward. Given the scope and gravity of the contemporary
human condition, it seems only logical that the path to new psychological paradigms should be blazed by the philosophical descendants of the third force architects.

Aligned with these calls for a “new psychology” that moves away from the natural science perspective and embraces the discipline in a way that is more caring, humanistic, transpersonal, and dialogical (Holdstock, 2000), this article advocates the open exploration of alternatives that can withstand the rigors of scientific inquiry while simultaneously paying appropriate homage to our innate sense of wonder and joy. Embodied within this spirit of quest and culture of hope, this article seeks to offer up a new psychological paradigm grounded in an ancient African worldview replete with common sense, compassion, wisdom, respect, gentleness, love, and universal harmony—the Ubuntu paradigm.

HUMANISTIC PARADIGMS

“Western” Humanistic Psychology

Although traditional humanistic psychology has most often been associated with the pursuit of self and a quest for the attainment of an individual’s highest potential (Jenkins, 2001), there is also an historical foundation and emphasis on human interconnectedness within the discipline, dating back to the phenomenological writings of Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger. Influencing the humanistic psychologists that would follow, Binswanger’s writings of the late 1950s emphasized the importance of what he, following Heidegger, referred to as the *Mitwelt*, which is the social world shared with others. Binswanger argued that the *Mitwelt* was one of the essential existential structures (along with *Umwelt*—the environment—and *Eigenwelt*—personhood) that determine human experience (Moss, 2001).

Another early influence on the development of the humanistic paradigm was Martin Buber (1965), who argued that the complete range of human potential cannot be fully developed unless one has the opportunity to be engaged in relationship with others: “It is from one man to another that the heavenly bread of self-being is passed” (p. 71).

The works of Alfred Adler suggest a strong human desire to be part of a group that we can contribute to and work to ensure its well-being. And May stated, “No one can separate oneself from
one’s social group and remain healthy, as the very structure of one’s personality is dependent upon the community” (May, in Rowan, 2004, p. 56).

Rogers said we must suspend our own beliefs to understand the world of the other. His humanistic call for “unconditional positive regard” and empathic understanding extends beyond the therapeutic milieu in which he originally proposed it.

Even Maslow, known for his hierarchy of needs and the individual’s quest for self-actualization, includes human kinship as one of the primary characteristics of the self-actualized person (Rowan, 2004). “The movement towards psychological health is also the movement towards spiritual peace and social harmony” (Maslow, in Rowan, 2004, p. 230), suggesting the full expression of self-actualization must present itself in relation to others. Almost without exception, the early humanistic psychologists recognized that our greatest individual potential is tied to our abilities to recognize and encourage the greatest potential of others as well. So although humanistic psychology has historically been viewed as a psychology of individual expression and growth, it has always had an acknowledgement, appreciation, and reverence for the fact that we are connected to others in ways that are vital to our psychological development and well-being.

According to Vygotsky (1978), people’s actions are greatly influenced by the social, cultural, and historical context of the activities that they share with the other people in their lives. Interaction is key to our development. We are fundamentally social creatures, and to survive and thrive, we are drawn to belong to groups (Brack, Hill, Edwards, Grootboom, & Lassiter, 2003). It is through our participation in these social groups and our interactions with others that we develop our sense of self. The connection is vital. “The self is part of the social world, and the social world is part of the self” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 100).

Heretofore, this communal aspect of the discipline has been overshadowed by a dedication to individual development and, more recently, concerns surrounding efficacy and even necessity of the field. As mentioned earlier, there is a new wave of humanistic psychologists now looking beyond the emphasis on self to embrace and expand on the importance of our human interconnectedness. It is becoming increasingly clear that Western psychology must evolve to accommodate the realities of multiculturalism and a burgeoning global society. The Vietnamese monk and poet Thich Nhat Hanh frequently stated, “We are here to awaken from the illusion of our
separateness.” Contemporary humanistic psychology is poised to lead this awakening if we can successfully shift our working paradigms from an emphasis on self to one predicated on self in relation to others. To suggest that our very survival may depend on it would not be an overstatement at this critical juncture in human social development. Pilisuk and Parks (1986) note,

Actual human interdependence is far greater than our contemporary values recognize. Understanding this interdependence is critical to our health, our sense of belonging, and even the survival of the human community. Where interdependence is nourished, it provides a healing web with remarkable powers for regeneration of the human potential. (p. xi)

It is time for a paradigm shift that recognizes the integral importance of our interactions and interconnectedness, a new paradigm that not only honors our humanistic roots but also branches out and seeks to address the difficulties of a world far more diverse, complex, and fundamentally wounded than that of Rogers, May, and Maslow.

There are barriers to such a significant paradigm change that are deeply engrained in the American worldview and our current psychologies that will be difficult to surmount and most assuredly prevent us from moving forward. The development of a new paradigm for the future necessitates the examination of these barriers and seems to be a logical base from which to begin our explorations.

**Barriers to American Understanding: Individualism and Ethnocentrism**

**Individualism.** “Culture, history, and geographical context are inextricably intertwined in shaping behavior and in determining the collective and the individual identity” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 81). No doubt these factors played a fundamental role in the development of the overwhelmingly individualistic nature of American society. Our country was founded by those seeking to separate and express their independence. Our Constitution guarantees the rights of individuals. We are a nation that prides itself on personal initiative and independent success. Our collective identity is not one of a united whole but that of an aligned many.

Our psychology, “Western” psychology, reflects this commitment to individualism and in many ways serves to perpetuate our
seeming inability to get along with the rest of the world. “Individualism, competition and materialism provide criteria for self-definition as a natural consequence of a worldview in which a finite and limited focus orients us toward such disorder that we fight one another to sustain an illusion” (Myers, 1993, p. 10).

Unlike other, more collectivistic cultures, we have very little understanding of the solace and emotional strength offered by the unconditional acceptance of simple belonging. It is said that starving people in Africa have been known to travel great distances just so they might die with other starving people. Unfortunately, the power and profundity offered by such an act would be lost as little more than an interesting anecdote to the average individualistically indoctrinated American.

**Ethnocentrism.** “Culture should not be viewed separately from the rest of life; it is the compass of life” (Vontress & Epp, 2001, p. 374). With the exception of contemporary humanistic psychologists discussed previously, Western psychology, as with Western society in general, is notoriously ethnocentric. To our detriment, we have been slow to address the importance and necessity of culture. An unwavering attachment to the perceived superiority of Western psychological interventions often prevents us from embracing, or even acknowledging, that an approach that is more holistic, humanistic, and person positive might exist. We are therefore left with paradigms and treatment modalities that are outdated and woefully inadequate to deal with the myriad of problems presented by the demands of the 21st century on the individual and society alike.

Historically, psychology has been the bastion of privileged White males of European descent (Serlin & Criswell, 2001), both in terms of those researching, developing, and providing psychological services and those receiving them. The psychological needs of women, persons of color, and indigenous populations have traditionally been viewed through the lenses of White male domination. “The intellectual imperialism of Western patriarchy has proven to be viciously intolerant of any perspective that breaks the bonds of its conceptual incarceration” (Myers, 1993, p. 4).

Entrenched as we are within the confines of our hubris, Western psychology assumes that all humans, everywhere, are fundamentally alike, regardless of culture or the way people perceive their world and the greater world around them. “Contemporary psychology assumes that it speaks for all people” (Holdstock, 2000, p. ix). The
flaws inherent in this mind-set have long alienated the profession from the majority world and have established psychology as an elitist discipline that offers very little practical application to “real” life.

There do exist models of humanism that have proven to be vital components of (primarily) communal societies and potentially offer new paths for a unifying, universal psychology. In particular, there is the collectivistic worldview embodied within the quintessentially humanistic and philosophical concept of Ubuntu that has been successfully practiced on the African continent for thousands of years.

Ubuntu and African humanism, along with indigenous African folk psychologies, have long been dismissed by contemporary Western psychology and yet have proven to be much more effective and enduring modalities when utilized among indigenous populations. In contrast, efforts to introduce Western psychological paradigms into sub-Saharan cultures have met with extreme resistance and less than stellar results.

Into Africa—Imported Western psychology

“The bourgeois ideology that proclaims all men to be essentially equal, manages to remain consistent with itself by urging the subhuman to rise to the level of Western humanity that it embodies” (Fanon, 1963, p. 110). Much like other facets of colonization, the science of psychology was imported and imposed on Africans without regard or adaptation to their cultural traditions and unique sociological circumstances. In South Africa, the paternalistic imperialism of Eurocentric psychology was far removed from relevance to the life experiences of the Black South African. It was also inextricably tied to the cruel and overtly racist policies of the Apartheid regime, making it unavailable (and unattractive) to the Black majority population. Consequently, most South Africans today are unfamiliar even with the term psychology (Nsamenang, 1995).

Among the relatively few indigenous Africans who can afford it and choose to seek out the services of psychologists trained in and committed to Western psychological paradigms, most find not only an inherent power differential but also an attitude that pathologizes and dismisses the indigenous belief systems and folk psychologies that have sustained South African communities for generations (Edwards et al., 1983; Nama & Swartz, 2002).

“Current psychological practices are Western in origin, imported,
decontextualized, non-African and therefore inappropriate for a country which has many Third World characteristics’’ (Hickson & Kriegler, 2001, p. 784).

An overwhelming majority of South Africans still rely on folk remedies, including treatments for emotional and psychological ailments. Highly regarded traditional healers, known locally as sangomas, offer up complementary therapies firmly rooted in centuries of tradition and reverent of the restorative powers of connection with the natural world.

African folk psychology has been dismissed by most ethnocentric Western psychologists, yet it often contains insights that may be difficult to verify utilizing the rigor of Western scientific methods but are nonetheless vital and legitimate (Nsamenang, 1995).

A biocentric vision of people as part of the natural world, but not its center is in sharp contrast with the worldview of technocratic societies, which have become obsessed with control and dominance: humans over nonhuman nature, masculine over feminine, the wealthy and powerful over the poor. (Cock & Bernstein, 2002, p. 80)

As humanistic psychologists, we must strive to be open to new paradigms that incorporate regard and respect for the legitimacy of psychological traditions other than our own. Continued submission to a rigid imperialistic mind-set will only serve to further alienate us from the majority world and will eventually lead to the devolution of psychology as a serious and essential discipline.

African Humanism and Worldview

African humanism differs from Western humanism in that it embodies centuries of indigenous wisdoms and a collectivistic worldview that is paramount to African survival. To understand African humanism is to understand that an African is a social being and, as such, cannot be separated from the community in which he or she belongs. Relationships with others are viewed as far more important than the individual experience (Ikuenobe, 2006). This is not to imply that the African’s individuality is negated or in any way diminished; it is merely viewed as secondary to the well-being of the community (Teffo, 1996).

The ideal African values sharing and compassion. “The individual has a social commitment to share with others what he has. The ideal person will be judged in terms of his relationship with others” (Teffo, 1996, p. 104). Africans interdependently view the
self. A person is empowered and fulfilled only in terms of his or her relationships with others. They view their personal behaviors as intertwined with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others with whom they share interdependent relationships.

“In a collective society, to do wrong does not mean merely to be individually in disharmony with the order of nature, but rather to harm and disorganize this order itself” (Van Vlaenderen, 2001, p. 152). Harmony, cooperation, and interdependence are more than idealistic concepts in Africa. They are essential life skills every African child learns from a very early age.

The African self is an extended self that includes not only the entire community but the ancestors, those as yet unborn and all of nature (Myers, 1993). Consequently, African humanism becomes embodied in a holistic life orientation. There is a web of interconnectedness not just between peoples, but among all forms of life, and it is universally believed in Africa that humans are part of the natural world, not dominant over it. African worldviews place a great deal of importance on harmony with nature. Every aspect of life, animate and inanimate, is respected and revered by the African. The African does not view himself or herself as “better than” other inhabitants of his or her universe but rather as living in harmony with all things great and small.

The worldview that everything is interdependent and integrates into the whole universe can be seen as providing a necessary, almost spiritual base of knowledge from which Africans have negotiated life circumstances that are often physically and emotionally demanding. Without such complete understanding of and devotion to interconnectedness, human life on the continent of Africa would have ceased centuries ago. Van Vlaenderen (2001) stated,

In traditional African society, all knowledge is for practical purpose, namely to be safe and prosperous, and it is believed that this cannot be achieved by any person in isolation.

Therefore, the practical aim of knowledge is the social welfare of the group. The good is never seen as an individualistic advantage but always contains the perspective of participation in the communal life. (p. 153)

THE CONCEPT OF UBUNTU

Key to the development of the collective, humanistic identity of a majority of Africans, particularly indigenous South Africans, is what is considered the ultimate African virtue—Ubuntu. Ubuntu
is the major tenet of the African worldview philosophy. For generations, an overarching commitment to the philosophy of Ubuntu has successfully guided the thoughts and actions of millions of Africans across the continent, providing a way of life that has nourished and sustained many communities against obstacles great and small (Mnyaka & Mothlabi, 2005).

Ubuntu is the glue that holds African communities together, often despite what we in the West would consider to be overwhelming struggles and difficulties. Some variation of the word Ubuntu is found in nearly all languages spoken in South Africa (Holdstock, 2000). It is a guiding philosophy that dictates traditional behavior and provides a set of desired goals that communities and individuals alike strive to achieve.

Understanding Ubuntu is crucial in understanding South African culture. A universal definition of Ubuntu is impossible to articulate, and the concept is often difficult for individualistic Westerners to fully comprehend. Ubuntu has been described many ways:

- “As a philosophy of life, which in its most fundamental sense represents personhood, humanity, humaneness and morality” (Mokogoro, in Brack et al., 2003, p. 319).
- “Ubuntu is the desire to live in harmony with others and to submit one’s own needs for the benefit of the social framework in which one lives” (Van Vlaenderen, 2001, p. 150).
- The qualities of compassion, care, gentleness, respect, and empathy are essential elements of Ubuntu (Holdstock, 2000).
- “Ubuntu is ‘motho ke motho ba batho ba bangue/umutu ngumuntu ngabantu’ which, literally translated, means a person can only be a person through others . . . the individual’s whole existence is relative to that of the group” (Brack et al., 2003, p. 319).
- Mnyandu (1997) stated,

Ubuntu is not merely positive human qualities, but the very human essence itself, which lures and enables human beings to become abantu or humanized beings, living in daily self-expressive works of love and efforts to create harmonious relationships in the community and the world beyond. (p. 81)

Ubuntu embodies the quintessential essence of humanness, specifically a respect and love of others that guides all aspects of daily life. The most well-known description of Ubuntu comes from South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his 2005 book, *God Has a Dream*:

[Ubuntu] is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours.
I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion. A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them. (p. 26)

Western Applications

Can the principle communalistic philosophies of Ubuntu be incorporated into a positive new psychological paradigm for the 21st century? Some naysayers would argue that the promise of Ubuntu is nothing more than an anachronistic pipe dream, pandering to the hopes of the ignorant masses that there could possibly exist a better, more genuine, and holistic way of life than would be available to them. The intellectual elite could postulate that Ubuntu is neither scientific nor academic. Others might speculate that a psychological paradigm based on Ubuntu could not possibly be sophisticated enough to apply within the constructs of a modern therapeutic milieu. Beyond the benefits that could be gleaned from embracing Ubuntuian principles as a guiding philosophy for individual “being-in-the-world,” I would argue that Ubuntu is precisely what is needed in therapeutic milieus.

Practical Applications: Ubuntu as a Treatment Modality

It could be argued that rather than continuing to differentiate African and Western healing practices, neither of which seems to successfully approach universality, an integrative approach based on Ubuntu can and should be developed. Such a philosophical construct seems relatively easy to conceptualize, but is it possible to translate the symbolic idealism inherent in Ubuntu into concrete programming and practical application within traditional U.S.–American organizations, institutions, and treatment facilities? The answer that resonates with potential is yes. The principle communalistic philosophies of Ubuntu can be incorporated into a positive new psychological paradigm for the 21st century. Beyond the benefits that could be gleaned from embracing Ubuntuian principles as

Residential treatment facilities, retirement homes, and even correctional institutions are, by their very nature, self-contained communities. Ubuntu-based programming and curricula could be developed to reframe the experiences of these facilities, positively accentuating the healing powers of community and building not only a sense of belonging but also an awareness of individual responsibility to something greater than oneself—the community.

An Ubuntu-driven model has the potential to be incorporated with relative ease into existing therapeutic programming or instituted as the foundational underpinnings of programs yet to be established. Although space constraints limit an in-depth exploration of the integration of Ubuntu into the programmatic machinations of each of these communities, consider the implications on one type of therapeutic community—the child and adolescent residential treatment facility (RTC).

There are in excess of 65,000 children and adolescents currently in U.S.–American RTCs (Hainesworth, 2001), and existing therapeutic models utilized within the majority of those RTCs have historically “been guided by psychoanalytic, behavioral or learning theory” (Abramovitz & Bloom, 2003, p. 121). These facilities typically focus on individually designed interventions, aimed at controlling disruptive behaviors with crisis-driven protocols and short-term conflict management.

Emphasizing the individual treatment of individual youth often results in little attention being paid to the fundamentally interactive and interpersonal nature of the therapeutic milieu and, more importantly, the world at large to which these youth will eventually return. This is particularly ironic in that a large number of youth placed in RTCs are there not because they are mentally ill but because they have serious interpersonal difficulties (Hainesworth, 2001). Elaborate treatment plans are developed to help youth control their behaviors, overcome their addictions, and manage their emotions, yet little therapeutic emphasis is placed on helping them develop empathy, caring, and authentic interpersonal concern.

Admission to an RTC often involves a diagnosis of an Axis I disruptive disorder—attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder—each of which has diagnostic criteria that includes interpersonal difficulties (Hainesworth,
Often comorbidly present with these disruptive disorders is a diagnosis of reactive attachment disorder. Characterized by disturbed social relatedness and inability to “respond in a developmentally appropriate fashion to most social interactions” (DSM-IV-TR; American Psychological Association, 2000), significant attachment disorders tend to be quite resistant to therapeutic change (Hughes, 1999). Few programs address attachment issues, as there is the prevailing belief that attachment therapy is extremely difficult with older children and involves a lengthy process (18 to 24 months) that far exceeds the financial commitment most insurance providers are willing to accept (Hughes, 1999).

Programs that do emphasize the importance of “getting along with others” generally do so as a tool for managing control of the milieu, not as a means of establishing interpersonal connections and group harmony. Consequently, residents may learn the superficial behavioral posturings of “how to get along” within the confines of a rigidly constructed, structured environment but have no clue as to how to conduct a genuine, mutually rewarding interpersonal relationship, especially when removed from the relatively predictable RTC environment and placed back into the “real world” (Bloom, 2005). Not surprisingly, longitudinal research conducted by the National Adolescent and Child Treatment Study found that 45% of the children placed in RTCs were readmitted to mental health facilities, and 29% were subsequently incarcerated (Hainesworth, 2001). These statistics are clearly indicative of the need for a radical paradigm shift within child and adolescent residential treatment that will place greater emphasis on interpersonal interactions and successful community citizenship.

Ubuntu and the Sanctuary Model

Based on the assumption that the majority of youth in RTCs have had significant early childhood traumas (Bloom, 2005), sanctuary proponents argue that the (often) dysfunctional organizational culture of traditional RTCs serves to exacerbate, not eradicate, the traumatic experiences of their residents. In 2005, Bloom proposed the sanctuary model as a coherent alternative to psychoanalytically oriented, crisis-driven residential treatment for children:

The Sanctuary model represents a trauma-informed whole system approach designed to facilitate the development of structures, processes, and behaviors on the part of staff, children, and the community-as-a-whole that can counteract the biological, affective,
cognitive, social, and existential wounds suffered by the children in care. (p. 65)

Sanctuary advocates a democratic, nonviolent therapeutic culture that is trauma sensitive and aims to develop open communication, social responsibility, and “healthy attachment relationships” (Bloom, 2005, p. 71). To facilitate accomplishment of these goals, Ubuntuian principles could be incorporated in the day-to-day operations of sanctuary RTCs. Key to this would be acceptance of the concept of communalism as a core value. Learning to accept that their own welfare is “dependent upon the welfare of all” (Kamwangamalu, 1999, p. 28) would help previously narcissistic residents establish prosocial attitudes and reinforce a spirit of cooperation and togetherness. Equally important would be the belief that each individual is a member of the community and that with membership comes obligations and responsibilities, but no one, regardless of any past or present transgressions, would be isolated or shunned from the community. “Everyone belongs and there is no one who does not belong” (Mnyaka & Mothlabi, 2005, p. 221). For children and adolescents who have experienced multiple traumas, psychic insults, and repeated rejections (both physical and emotional), the prospects of attaining such “unconditional positive regard” could have profoundly life-altering effects.

Decision making and conflict resolution within an Ubuntu-based program could incorporate aspects of both Native American healing circles and an African system of democracy, in which all members are offered an opportunity to listen and express their views, followed by discussions leading to a resolution reached by consensus. Also essential to the healing culture of an Ubuntu sanctuary would be an informal, relaxed way of living and peaceful understanding of our interconnectedness with the environment, animals, and nature. Interaction with the natural world and animals would be encouraged, as would participation in the creative and expressive arts—singing, dancing, painting, sculpting, and so on.

The ultimate goal of an Ubuntu program would be to attain the qualities and characteristics of personhood that define the African concept of being fully and completely human. Specifically, residents and staff would be encouraged to embrace and embody 14 Ubuntu virtues, or qualities of humanness:

- Hospitality
- Compassion
- Empathy
• Tolerance
• Respect
• Interdependence
• Collective solidarity
• Patience
• Kindness
• Reconciliation
• Cooperation
• Warmth
• Forgiveness
• Supportiveness

These Ubuntu virtues would be the guiding principles of interpersonal interaction within the facility and would be woven together into integrative programming consistent across all three components of the RTC community—therapy, schooling, and housing milieus. Such therapeutic attunement could only serve to make each milieu a safer, stronger, and ultimately more holistic community, capable of facilitating successful, long-term therapeutic outcomes.

Practical applications of Ubuntu within the confines of child and adolescent RTCs offer but one example of the potential inherent in the development of an Ubuntu paradigm. Other arenas for facilitation remain to be uncovered and explored, limited only by the depth and breadth of our imaginations. The possibilities for utilization of the Ubuntu paradigm are myriad and the implications profound.

DISCUSSION: A PROMISING NEW PARADIGM?

“Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies” (Fanon, 1967, p. 8). Simple, interconnected human paradigms must be considered crucial to our intrinsic advancement. We need only look at the chaotic state of our world to realize that our commitment to technology, individuality, and arrogance has left us with an ersatz sense of fulfillment and a longing for authentic connection. We are empty, alone, and afraid. We yearn for the as yet unnamed, and we know deep in our hearts that there has to be more.

Perhaps we have deceived ourselves into truly believing progress overrides people. Perhaps in our overwhelming zeal for advancement, we have overlooked the obviously simple and elemental pathways to enlightenment, or we have abdicated our opportunities for actualization and enlightenment in favor of the material comforts of conformity.
If this is true, then we must passionately and collectively seek out new pathways or face the inevitable consequences of our complacency. “We cannot expect a new world order to come about if we continue to endorse a concept of the self as a closed and self-sufficient unit of the social system” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 204).

The Ubuntu paradigm is not a panacea. Embracing it as a new force in the field of psychology will not immediately lead to widespread, loving communion among all peoples of the earth. It will not end disease and famine and war and corruption. We have to simply look at the African tribal genocides of the recent past and the daily African-on-African horrors (e.g., the South African epidemic of child rape) to see that a commitment to Ubuntu cannot cure all ills.

What it will do, as it has done for century on century of Africans, is provide us with a new layer of compassionate understanding that is nurturing and protective—a holistic cocoon of interconnection that will help us surmount the trials and tribulations of the world of disarray in which we are embedded and allow us to successfully navigate a future ripe with uncertainties. “We can either model our behavior on power or on Ubuntu. It is the challenge for psychology to bring home the futility of the one and the potential of the other” (Holdstock, 2000, p. 206).

REFERENCES


