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An Inquiry into the Life and Accomplishments of Dr. Robert L. Williams

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An Inquiry into the Life and Accomplishments of Dr. Robert L. Williams

Cover Page Footnote

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Like other fields, the field of psychology can trace its roots back to the pioneering efforts of early scientists, scholars, and professionals. From the inception of psychology as a recognized science these individuals have been widely regarded and lauded as being the architects and builders of the field as a whole, and subfields specifically. Some of these individuals have become household names, highlighting their significance to the field, as well as greater society (Kimble et al., 1991). From Freud to Skinner, Wundt to Bandura, it becomes apparent that these individuals pushed the boundaries of what was possible, thus propelling psychology into the current iteration that is seen today.

While these individuals' accomplishments and influence on the field cannot be understated, history has disregarded and excluded other key pioneers in the field on the basis of their minority status. This is particularly the case for Dr. Robert Williams, who despite having made a tremendous impact on the field, remains relatively anonymous compared to other figures of his era. The current commentary aims to fill in this gap in psychology's history, by providing an inside look into the accomplishments of Dr. Williams. Particular attention will be paid to four notable accomplishments: the founding of the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), the development of the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (BITCH-100), the coining of the term Ebonics, and the development of the concept of racial scripting. These accomplishments hold great social justice implications for Black psychologists and the greater Black community, education and standardized testing reform, and understanding and combating racism. The authors aim to discuss these accomplishments in detail, while highlighting the underlying influences, zeitgeist, and consequences of these accomplishments, as a means of making his work and legacy more visible in the history of psychology.

Background and Early Life

Born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1930 (Williams, 2008), Dr. Williams likely experienced the traumas of interpersonal and systemic racism prevalent in the South during the Jim Crow era. Additionally, he grew up in a low socioeconomic (SES) household with a sister and single mother who worked as a house cleaner for White families. His father worked as a millwright before dying when Dr. Williams was five years old, highlighting the vulnerable nature of his childhood and living conditions (Williams, 2008). Yet, one of the most salient challenges, the one that he would spend much of his life combating, was the use of standardized tests for justifying discriminatory and prejudicial practices against racial minorities (Madison, 2014).

Before becoming an accomplished psychologist, Dr. Williams had mixed experiences with education. On one end, he was extremely accomplished: graduating high school at 16, graduating college cum laude, and obtaining a

Masters's and Ph.D. in educational psychology and clinical psychology, respectively (Williams, 2008). On the other end, Dr. Williams scored a low IQ score of 82 while in high school and was thus actively discouraged from going to college. In fact, in a 2010 lecture, Dr. Williams described remembering one teacher specifically tell him that he was "not college material" (Williams, 2010). Despite these explicit denigrating messages and deterrents, he persevered, becoming the first Black student to earn a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri (Williams, 2008). From this point forward, his life and accomplishments would be defined by his ability to overcome oppressive experiences and use the lessons gleaned to inform his professional work.

Association of Black Psychologists

In discussing the formation of ABPsi as well as Dr. William's involvement in the organization, it is beneficial to first describe the climate towards Black psychologists at that time. Similar to his experience as a Black Ph.D. student, Williams (1974) stated that before the founding of ABPsi, Black psychologists were rather rare and held little influence. The Black psychology community was splintered and did not converse with one another often. Dr. Williams described Black psychologists as, "separate as the fingers on the hand" (Williams, 1974, p. 9). However, the sentiment started to change in the late 1960s as America was at the height of the Black consciousness movement. Due to this increased feeling of Black agency, Black caucuses were held, which influenced the creation of close to 20 Black national organizations in America around this time (Williams, 1974). The rise of Black organizations in the areas of sociology, psychology, social work, political science, economics, and others, created stronger professional relationships, which focused on the under-representation of Black individuals in professional roles (Williams, 1974).

Although Dr. Kenneth B. Clark was the first Black president of The American Psychological Association (APA) in 1970, there was a dearth of Black professionals in psychology by the late 1960s. The Awkard Report, commonly known as the Wispe report, gathered information on the Black professionals in the United States (Awkard, 1969). The Wispe report was a national study commissioned by congress to assess education inequality. The report showed 9,914 doctorates were granted in psychology between 1920 and 1966 of those only 93 doctorates or one percent were earned by Black individuals. Also, many of the major universities were not graduating Black psychologists. Schools such as UCLA, Cornell, Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, to name a few, had not graduated a Black student with a doctorate in psychology (Williams, 1974). As a result of the inequality in degrees granted, there were only 300 Black psychologists in the United States in the late 1960s. Williams (1974) made it clear that the disparity of

Black professionals was not reserved for the field of psychology. In other fields, the same underrepresentation could be found. For example, sociology graduated 13,000 doctoral students, of those, only 85 or .5% were given to Black Americans.

The alarming statistics that confronted Black professionals in the field of psychology motivated those in the field to action. In September 1968, over 200 Black psychologists from across many areas of industry came together to discuss a plan that involved pooling resources to combat the broad issues of racism and poverty (Williams, 1974). According to Williams (2008), Black psychologists were frustrated at how APA condoned racist American society by not putting forth measures to counter inequality. Also, APA did not recognize the rise in Black nationalism as a way for growth in the Black community. This group of psychologists decided to take the uplifting of their community into their own hands and created a national organization for Black psychologists on September 2, 1968, in the city of San Francisco, California, called the Association of Black Psychologists (Williams, 2008). The members decided to see themselves as Black people first, then psychologists, as such, they could not ignore the exploitation of the Black community through the maintenance of the status quo in American society. The first chairmen of ABPsi were Robert Green and Charles Thomas, both of whom were unanimously selected to hold the position. At the inception of ABPsi, concerns, which articulated the frustrations that lead to a break with the APA, were formalized. These concerns centered around APA not attempting to relate to the Black community, the unfair use of community resources such as research for the betterment of the White community, and APA's refusal to confront racism within the White community (Williams, 2008). From these three concerns, a seven-point position was created and given to the APA which covered issues of recruitment and retention of Black psychologists, as well as the integration of APA leadership with Black members. The response from APA was non-productive and evasive, giving platitudes to the new organization but not much substance (Williams, 1974).

During the second national meeting of ABPsi, Dr. Williams was elected as president (Williams, 2008). During Dr. Williams' tenure, there were actions taken towards the concerns that were previously formalized. Dr. Williams created and sent a ten-point plan with the aim of the improvement of Black recruitment and retention in the field of psychology, the use of research to focus on issues unique to the Black community, and the creation of a committee of Black graduate student affairs, among other things. Thirty-five university and college psychology departments adopted the whole ten-point program proposed by Dr. Williams and others adopted parts. Another indicator of growth was the Commission for Accelerating Black Participation in Psychology. The commission was formed with the goal of addressing areas of concern that were previously noted. This committee was made up of members from ABPsi, APA, and The Black Student Psychological Association (BSPA). From this commission, the BSPA office was established in

the APA building with three years of APA provided funding (Williams, 2008). Another area of growth that occurred during Dr. Williams's tenure was the development of the Journal of Black Psychology. Dr. Williams reached out to the members of ABPsi to inquire about the need for a journal that focused on Black psychological issues. The feedback he received was overwhelmingly positive and the first edition of the Journal of Black Psychology was published in 1974 (Williams, 2008).

At the 1970 ABPsi convention, two noteworthy events occurred which led to greater ABPsi independence. First, Dr. Williams cautioned the organization about its dependent relationship with APA. Second, Dr. Wade Nobles introduced an Afrocentric Psychology as a guide for the organization. A greater independence was needed to implement an African-centered perspective organization-wide. Also, a fear of being known as a division of the APA were factors that influenced the organization to gain more independence from APA.

The contributions of Dr. Williams to psychology justifies a place in the annals of the history of the field. Through the creation of ABPsi, Black psychologists have gained an organization that focuses on the African American experience in support, research, and cultivation. Although Dr. Williams was not the only one who founded the organization, his involvement is not as well known. Of his many accomplishments in his life, the founding of ABPsi should be one of his greatest and he deserves to be recognized for the feat of bravery and conviction. This period of accomplishment highlighted the importance of representation, unity, and advocacy for historically marginalized people broadly and psychologists specifically. An area of work that Dr. Williams felt personally connected to is the area of intelligence testing.

Intelligence Testing

While Dr. Williams was able to surpass the restrictive nature of standardized tests and earn a Ph.D., other members of minority groups were not so fortunate. Central to this issue was the extent to which one's educational career, and thus social mobility, was and is still largely determined by one's test scores. Moreover, tests have been used in employment settings as a means of informing decision-making and assessing professional progress (Green & Griffore, 1980). In America, this has had a profound impact on minority groups as they have historically not performed well on standardized tests relative to their White counterparts (Green & Griffore, 1980; Madison, 2014).

The notion of using testing to judge the intellectual abilities of racial and ethnic minority groups is not a novelty, as standardized tests in the early 20th century were used to classify Irish and Italian immigrants as intellectually impaired (Ayers, 1909). From these findings, many scholars and educators alike concluded

that minorities were intellectually inferior, and thus could not be held to the same standards of education and employment as their White counterparts (Jensen, 1980). Arthur Jensen, a renowned educational psychologist, was one such pundit, who in 1969 proposed that discrepancies in White and Black IQ scores were largely due to genetics (Madison, 2014). With a personal and professional stance in the intelligence debate, Dr. Williams sought to discredit these assertions through the development of a culturally relevant intelligence test.

In direct response to his personal experiences with standardized testing, as well as the genetic-leaning zeitgeist prevalent in public and scholarly circles, Dr. Williams proposed that standardized tests were Eurocentric and culturally biased against communities of color (Madison, 2014; Williams, 2008). In essence, he asserted that differences in scores between communities of color and White communities were attributable to differences in social conditions and culture, rather than genetics. Other like-minded scholars of the era sought to address these inherent biases by producing "culture-free" and "culture-fair" intelligence tests. These tests were produced to be universal and free of cultural biases, yet ultimately proved to be insignificant as they showed lower predictive validity than traditional tests (Anastasia, 1968). These cultural trends led Dr. Williams to develop the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (BITCH-100; Williams, 1972). Rather than attempting to create a test free of bias, he sought to create a test that would accurately assess the intelligence of Black students, as well as showcase the flaws and biases in standardized tests.

BITCH-100

The BITCH-100 is a 100-item pencil-and-paper test that was designed to be culturally relevant to the lives and experiences of African Americans in the United States. Some examples of these items include "Alley Apple is...", "CPT means a standard of...", and "Deuce-and-a-quarter is..." (McGuire, 1977; Williams, 1972). In framing items in a language that was relevant to Black individuals, he believed a more accurate reflection of their intelligence and aptitude could be captured. What is evident, is that an initiative was needed to address the pervasive issue of IQ testing as a justification for discriminatory practices.

To evaluate the BITCH-100, Dr. Williams administered the test to White and Black high school students ($N = 100$) and then assessed whether the results would discriminate between White and Black students. His findings confirmed his hypothesis, in that Black subjects significantly outperformed White subjects on the test. When looking at the results more closely, only 8% of White subjects scored a 67 or above, compared to the 99% of Black subjects who scored above an 80 (Williams, 1972). This test highlighted the cultural sensitivity and bias embedded in tests that previous White scholars were interpreting as genetic differences. In a

second experiment, Dr. Williams assessed the validity of the test by examining its relationship to a well-established measure of intelligence, the California Achievement Test (CAT). These findings were less straightforward as although the BITCH-100 proved to be effective in identifying "intellectual indicators" not commonly found in traditional tests, the correlations between the two tests were low. Ultimately, Dr. Williams was able to illustrate that intelligence tests are not an accurate assessment of intelligence but rather of exposure to content, shining a light on the inherent cultural biases in tests, and subsequent harm they can cause. (Madison, 2014; Williams, 2010).

Legacy

Dr. Williams's legacy in regards to intelligence testing extends beyond his philosophical stances and initial studies on IQ testing with Black student populations. Following his creation and validation of the BITCH-100, Dr. Williams remained committed to deconstructing the practice of standardized testing. In a 1977 interview, William reported that his ultimate objective was to end what he calls the "death sentence [of] the low IQ" label that young Black students are labeled with and limited by for the rest of their lives (McGuire, 1977). This is not only a professional commitment but a personal one as well, as Dr. Williams has described refusing to let his children engage in standardized IQ testing. When asked about this position, he stated in the same interview, "My kids need education, not testing. If they are tested, the tests should help us understand what their educational needs are." In this statement, he is highlighting that tests are but one tool that educators should use at their disposal for identifying the needs of students, rather than a tool for brandishing them with life-long tags of deficiency. Through his research efforts, vocal presence, and personal commitments to addressing this issue, he eventually helped to facilitate change on a legislative level. While the NAACP was suing the California public school system for the displacement of Black students into special education classes, Dr. Williams was called upon as an expert witness on the matter (McGuire, 1977). With the concerted effort of Dr. Williams and other advocates of the time, the intelligence testing of Black students was eventually banned in California (Power et al., 2014). This marked a positive step in the dismantling of a system that has historically oppressed communities of color and preserved the social and educational standing of the White majority.

Ebonics

The Language Conference

In an article written by Dr. Williams (1997), he stated:

“The important point here is that my language is me. It is an extension of my being, my essence. It is a reflection and badge of my culture. Criticism of my language is essentially a direct attack on my self-esteem and cultural identity.” (p. 209)

Further, he indicated that Black English was a term coined by White linguists as opposed to Black people. Thus, Dr. Williams devised the term Ebonics at a conference in January 1973 (Yancy, 2011). The conference, called by Dr. Williams, was comprised of both Black and White scholars and linguists (Yancy, 2011). One of the most important events of the conference was the meeting that occurred with the Black scholars, independent of the White scholars. This meeting was particularly important because of its singular agenda; “We must name and define our reality rather than let others do that for us” (Williams, 1997, p. 210). Thus, the term Ebonics; a combination of the words ebony and phonics was coined.

According to Dr. Williams, Ebonics is an “African-based language that comes out of a family of African languages” (Yancy, 2011, p. 44). He called this conference to explore African language outside of the deficit model framework proposed by White scholars. Specifically, this conference was called to address the “cognitive and language development of the African American child” (Yancy, 2011, p. 43). In an interview with Yancy (2011), Dr. Williams stated:

“Their writings had been rather pejorative in the description of Black language. In fact, many of them came out of what is called the Deficit Model School, meaning that our language was deficient. I had grown very tired of reading those writings and I felt that African American scholars needed an opportunity to examine our own language and to do something about that.” (p. 43)

Origins

It is believed that Ebonics’ origins lay within African retention theory or pidgin/creole theory (Williams, 1997). Pidgin/creole theory suggests that through the slave trade, enslaved Africans developed a pidgin to communicate with one another. The development of this pidgin was critical, as the enslaved Africans who came from various regions in Africa did not speak the same languages; Ebonics developed as a result of this pidgin (Williams, 1997). Additionally, as stated by Williams (1997), “Whereas pidgin has no native speakers, Creole has pidgin at its source. The children of the slaves learned as their first language the pidgin that their parents spoke. That language is called “Creole” (p. 211). Following the development of the Pidgin and Creole languages, the process of Englishization occurred. Williams (1997) defined Englishization as “Ebonics where the speaker

maintains the original communication style, some lexical items, and the ability to code-switch" (p. 211). The process of Englishization resulted in Ebonics becoming more akin to the standard English spoken at the time. Conversely, African retention theory suggests that West African languages are of the same familial system as Ebonics. Examples of these West African languages include (1) fon; (2) mandinka; (3) twi; and (4) fante (Williams, 1997). According to Dr. Ernie Smith, "Ebonics is the African American's linguistic memory of Africa applied to English words" (Williams, 1997, p. 211).

Personal Communication

The pervasiveness of Ebonics can be observed across low SES Black populations in the U.S. (Williams, 1997; Yancy, 2011). Dr. Williams's family was low SES throughout his childhood. A consequence of this impoverished childhood was a lack of access to educational opportunities. In an interview with Yancy (2011), where he reflected on his experience speaking Ebonics throughout his childhood, Dr. Williams disclosed his lack of experience with basic educational standards. For example, he did not have an understanding of verb conjugation or the rules of standard English (Yancy, 2011). This lack of understanding was not due to a deficiency within himself, this was due to the disproportionate access to adequate educational opportunities for Black people of low SES. Dr. Williams believed that there was a correlation between access to adequate education and one's ability to acquire standard English (Yancy, 2011). In the interview with Yancy (2011), he disclosed the ways in which he acquired an understanding of standard English:

"I took a French class in college and it was at that time that the instructor talked about conjugating a verb and I was shocked that verbs had to be conjugated. There was an English professor who also invited me into his advanced composition class and he helped me to work on my English. And the French teacher helped me through a method of contrast. Having now two languages I was able to understand and improve my acquisition of Standard English". (p. 47)

Dr. William's disclosure highlights the ways in which he acquired an understanding of standard English and how the education system failed him as a child.

An Impetus for Research

An important implication of the establishment of Ebonics was the research that followed in its wake (Williams, 1997). From 1973-1974, four research studies demonstrating improvements in reading/test scores in Black children were

conducted. In a study by Williams and Rivers (1973), the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts was translated to Ebonics from standard English (as cited in Williams, 1997). Both versions of the Boehm Test of Basic Concepts were administered to Black, elementary-age children ($N = 990$). Results of this study indicated that Black students score higher on tests translated into Ebonics. Similarly, in a study by Rivers (1973), the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was translated from standard English to Ebonics (as cited in Williams, 1997). Results of this study indicated significant increases in Black children's IQ scores. Also, code-switching was observed across the participants. Lastly, in a study by Simpkins and colleagues (1974), a reading program entitled 'Bridge' was developed by researchers. This program was created to help children acquire standard English by having them transition from using Ebonics to standard English across a series of activities. Results of this study yielded positive results as reading scores significantly increased through the use of the program (as cited in Williams, 1997). Additionally, in 1975, Dr. Williams published a book entitled *Ebonics: The True Language of Black Folks* (Yancy, 2011). Thus, the research in this section highlights the important implication of recognizing Ebonics and its influence on Black children.

Board of Education

In 1996, the Board of Education in Oakland, California took a step to legitimize Ebonics within the Oakland education system; this step was the passing of a resolution regarding Ebonics as a legitimate and primary language (Sclafani, 2008). Before this day in history, Ebonics was not a language known to many (Williams, 1997). The main aim of the Board of Education's actions was to improve academics for Black children within the Oakland education system (Williams, 1997). Williams (1997) highlighted the disparities in language usage for Black children. He suggested that Black children are exposed to Ebonics through their parents and/or grandparents who speak it at home. Therefore, when the children enter the school system, they are punished and criticized for speaking Ebonics by their teachers, peers, and more (Williams, 1997). Dr. Williams described the criticism and punishment received for speaking Ebonics as particularly damaging; "Criticism of my language is essentially a direct attack on my self-esteem and cultural identity" (Williams, 1997, p. 209).

According to Sclafani (2008), a statement released to the public by the board of education described Ebonics as, "the language of many of the African American students in its school system and described the variety as a distinct and legitimate language with genetic roots in West African languages" (p. 510). In an interview with Yancy (2011), Dr. Williams described his distaste with the use of the term 'genetic'. Dr. Williams stated:

“Well, one thing that I found problematic was that they used the term genetically based and I think that set off a furor of discussion because it was understood by the public as indicating something biological, as involving chromosomes and genes, but that’s not what they intended. They were using the phrase genetically based in a linguistic way, that is, that one language develops out of another language. So, the genetic sense is used when we say that pidgin is developed and then Creole comes out of pidgin and then Ebonics out of that language. So, the term genetic here suggests a linguistic characteristic rather than a biological or a genetic characteristic”. (p. 50)

Additionally, the resolution proposed that Black children in Oakland should receive bilingual education through the use of federal funding (Sclafani, 2008). Although the resolution was eventually amended and then nullified, his role in giving voice to the language of Black people in the United States remains undisputed.

Dr. Williams saw the harm related to the Deficit Model School and sought out change through The Language Conference. Specific examples of the negative linguistic ideas related to the Deficit Model school included: (1) substandard speech; (2) deviant speech; (3) deficient speech; and (4) non-standard English (Williams, 1997). In an interview with Yancy (2011), he discussed the differences between the terms Ebonics and Black English. The differences posed by Dr. Williams were centered around the positive vs. pejorative connotations associated with the two terms; Ebonics as positive and Black English as pejorative. Ebonics was a way for Black people to eradicate the Deficit School Models for themselves; this was a powerful move for Black culture as a whole (Yancy, 2011). In an interview with Yancy (2011), Dr. Williams discussed his view that Ebonics is a threat to white supremacy. He shared his belief that by defining and acknowledging Ebonics, Black people were taking charge of their history and future, which threatened the racist power structures in place in the U.S. (Yancy, 2011).

Racial Scripting

On June 7, 1998, a Black man by the name of James Byrd Jr. was attacked by three White men. Shawn Berry, Lawrence Brewer, and John King took James to a secluded area, beat him, sprayed him with Black spray paint, then chained him to the back of a pickup truck and dragged him for three miles. Byrd remained alive, trying to hold his head off the ground, screaming for help, desperate to escape the bonds. He was killed about halfway through the dragging when his body hit the edge of a culvert, severing his right arm and head. The murderers drove on for another 1 1/2 miles before dumping his torso in front of a Black cemetery in Jasper Texas and driving off to enjoy themselves at a local barbeque (Seagert, 2019).

The story of James Byrd's murder made headlines, nationwide. For many, the act was reminiscent of lynchings not far enough in the past. At this pivotal moment when the field of psychology was beginning to realize that the colorblind society many had predicted in the 1960s was not imminent, Dr. Williams, wondered: How did these men learn to hate Black people so much? (University of Delaware, 1997; Williams, 2010). This question fueled the research that would be Dr. William's focus for the latter part of his career. He began questioning White children about what their parents had told them about Black people. Then he expanded his questioning to include Black children and the messages they had received about White People. His findings led to the development of the Racial Scripting Theory which he published in his book *Racism Learned at an Early Age Through Racial Scripting* (Williams, 2007).

Williams (2007) argued that "A racial script contains detailed instructions in our lives about ways we are supposed to view other races, and how we are supposed to feel about them (p. 43)." Dr. William's theory states that the instructions can be transmitted to children by parents, relatives, teachers, media, religious groups, and significant others. The messages can be positive, negative, neutral, or mixed but what they have in common is that they encourage people to focus on certain attributes within a racial group and ignore others (Williams, 2010). This causes the individual to be predisposed to respond according to the racial instruction that they internalized.

While racial scripts can be transmitted by a variety of sources, Dr. Williams (2010) believes that they are first acquired from parents. These scripts aren't necessarily taught to children directly but rather can be acquired through several avenues. The first avenue Dr. Williams identified was what he calls "identification" (Williams, 2007). This is the process that influences a child to think, feel, and behave like their parents. For this process to take place, the child must want to take on some of the characteristics of their parents because they see their parents as powerful. Thus, when racist scripts are presented, they are accepted without questioning the validity of the message. The second avenue is a process called "injunction" by which parents tell their children what not to do. Injunctions include, "Don't get dirty" and "Don't take what isn't yours" but can also include statements like "Don't date a Black person" (Williams, 2007). The last avenue by which racial scripts are transmitted from parent to child is through "attribution." This is the process of permitting to do the "right" thing. These messages could include a statement like "It's OK to play with a Black person." This is the only method that does not infringe on the child's autonomy because it leaves it up to the child to decide the OK-ness. Still, in homes where racist themes are practiced children are most likely to internalize racist scripts (Williams, 2007).

The transmission of racial scripts from parent to a child does not mean that a child is predestined to flesh them out in the same way as their parents. In fact,

many people are either more or less racist than their parents. Williams (2007) explains this phenomenon through a 6-stage process of racial script acquisition. The stages in the process are identified as Pre-exposure, Discover/Exposure, Script Activation, Counterscripting, Immersion/Avoidance, and Racial Maturity/Immaturity.

Phase 1: Pre-Exposure

The Pre-Exposure phase is the early period of a child's life before they have experiences with other races (Williams, 2007). Interestingly, Dr. Williams discovered that about 15% of White people could not recall a pre-exposure phase because they did not experience the racial isolation that the majority of White children experience. For some, this was because they were raised in a multicultural environment but for most, this was because they had a Black Maid, Nanny, or babysitter, as a young child. Still, 70% of his White participants reported growing up in a racially isolated environment and 85% described a Pre-Exposure phase.

In the Pre-Exposure phase, pro-racist or anti-racist attitudes are transmitted from parent to child (Williams, 2007). Scripts may include positive messages, negative messages, non-verbal negative scripts (i.e. anxiety around Blacks), neutral avoidance (i.e. not talking about race), and mixed scripts (i.e. mother and father transmit opposing scripts). During this time, scripts have no connection to any actual interactions with people of another race but they have already begun to influence how they perceive people of another race.

Phase 2: Discovery/Exposure

Dr. Williams (2007) describes the discovery phase as consisting of four levels: Passive Exposure: sight only, active contact/friendly interaction, encounter/hostile interaction, and phobic discovery. The first, and perhaps the lowest level of exposure is Passive Exposure. At this level, the child is exposed to other races, since they see them but they have no actual contact with them (Williams, 2007). This might involve passing them on the street or seeing them on the playground but does not involve engaging in an activity with them. The next level is the Active Contact/Friendly Interaction. This level involves any form of friendly or cooperative interaction with a person of another race. There is a significant body of research that suggests that this type of interaction leads to a reduction of prejudice. The next level of discovery is the Encounter/Hostile Interaction. This type of discovery is modeled after the Cross Model of Nigrescence. This level involves a competitive, unpleasant, or unwanted contact that leaves the individual feeling disadvantaged and frustrated. There is a significant body of research that suggests that this type of interaction leads to an increase in prejudice. The final level of

discovery is labeled Phobic Discovery. This is when a child has already internalized their parent's fear of other races and this fear colors everything about the interaction, often causing them to go to great lengths to discontinue it as soon as possible (Williams, 2007).

Phase 3: Script Activation

Dr. Williams (2007) defines racial script activation as “the automatic triggering of a racial response to a person of a different race” (p. 123). Essentially, this is a stage where racial scripts are triggered when a person is confronted with a primary racial stimulus, providing immediate access to a stereotype. Racial script activation is the reason that some White people may feel an unmerited sense of fear or anxiety upon seeing or interacting with a person of color. This is also why Black men often report being mistaken for bellmen or security guards. A White person sees a Black male, their racial script is activated providing immediate access to a stereotype, and without thinking, that person associates the Black individual with “the help.”

Phase 4: Counterscripting

Dr. Williams (2007) defines counterscripting as "a process of disconfirming an existing racial script (p. 135)." Racial scripts are not permanent structures. Even though they reflect a person's cultural heritage, learnings, and values, they are subject to change throughout life. For example, a positive interracial experience may neutralize a previously negative racial script. Further, some people may question and even rebel against internalizing racial scripts. In these cases, negative scripts are turned into positive scripts. However, if the script is disconfirmed, change is likely to follow.

Phase 5: Emergent or Avoidant

This phase is dichotomous in nature. Either one is attracted to people of other cultures, or they are repelled by them (Williams, 2007). The racial scripts that an individual has internalized will determine which side of the coin they choose. Early positive interactions and exposure to a diverse community will increase the likelihood that the individual has internalized positive scripts and cause them to move into the immersion or attraction side of the phase. By contrast, internalized negative scripts or fear of judgment by others within their race may cause a person to engage in the avoidant side of the phase. Still, others may have experienced that conflict with their racial scripts causing them to vacillate between sides.

Phase 6: Racial Maturity/Immaturity

Dr. Williams (2007) defines racial maturity as “having adequate knowledge and respect for members of other races plus the ability to interact comfortably and effectively with members of different races (p. 181).” Much like social maturity, racial maturity develops through appropriate exposure, interaction, and socialization with people of different races. Children who are exposed to early interracial interactions tend to be more racially mature than children who are not. By contrast, racial immaturity results from the exact opposite. Lack of exposure, racial isolation, and negative encounters with people of other races will lead to difficulties for an individual when faced with a situation where they need to interact with a person of a different race.

The goal of Dr. William’s research was to understand how it came to be that one person could hate another person, enough to torture and murder them, simply because they were of a different race (Williams, 2010). His racial scripting theory provides a framework by which we can gain a deeper understanding of racism. His book was written so that parents, family members, and educators could understand their role in the transmission and internalization of racist thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, which is a critical step in dismantling racial oppression. Also, Dr. Williams argued that the benefit of understanding this process and preventing young people from internalizing racist scripts extends beyond those who are victims and also benefits those who would be victimizers (Williams, 2007). Racism hurts everyone. For the victims, it leads to oppression, abuse, violence, and fear. For the racist, it leads to fear, anxiety, hatred, and confusion. While the cost is not comparable to the cost paid by victims of racism, Dr. Williams contends that society at large will benefit when racism is reduced.

Conclusion

The career of Dr. Williams is one of influence, innovation, and, at times, instigation. Throughout his career, he has been the embodiment of resilience and leadership, using his personal experiences with racial identity and discrimination to inform his professional pursuits and advance the field of psychology as a whole. He was part of the group of Black Psychologists who stood up to the APA and made their demands known in 1968. He took on the task of founding the Journal of Black Psychology. He challenged the idea that intelligence tests were fair and demonstrated to an entire scientific community that their "unbiased assessments" were in fact, very biased, and actually hurting the Black community. He coined the term Ebonics -- simultaneously legitimizing the language that the Black community spoke while causing outrage in non-Black communities. He brought clarity to our understanding of the way prejudice and hatred are transmitted to children. And yet

despite these accomplishments, history has gone out of its way to forget him because he is not a White man.

Implications

Dr. Williams's accomplishments and the context from which they emerged provide implications for contemporary issues in the areas of education, research, and advocacy. For instance, his efforts to illustrate the bias embedded within standardized testing and language in schools, combined with recent literature finding that students of color continue to underperform academically relative to their White counterparts (Wallace, 2017; Warren, 2017), highlights the continued need for more culturally sensitive and informed ways of teaching, testing, and evaluating students of color. This also has implications at the legislative level, where scholars continue to advocate for legislative reform that is responsive to historically marginalized students (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). Dr. Williams's contributions to the development of the *Journal of Black Psychology* and Afrocentric research also have implications for today's climate in which Black voices and perspectives remain underrepresented in contemporary psychology discourse (Beasley et al, 2016). Black researchers are more invested in communities of color and more cognizant of the importance of racial diversity in participant recruitment than White researchers (Roberts et al, 2020). The creation of the *Journal of Black Psychology* created a unique place for this important work to be published and for historically silenced voices to be amplified.

Taken together, these considerations highlight why it was important for the authors to highlight Dr. Williams' work in detail; to recognize the underlying influences and zeitgeist that propelled him toward these achievements, and to discuss the consequences of these accomplishments. Making his work and legacy more visible in the annals of psychology is, in effect, laying the groundwork for the recognition and immortalization of other accomplished psychologists of color. This is important because our present is a reflection of our past. The more that diversity is recognized in the narrative of our past, the richer our understanding of history -- and ourselves, will become. As Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "We are not makers of history. We are made by history" (King, 1963).

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