

Ethical Standards of Black Psychologists

Revised 2019

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction: Re-Thinking Ethics for Black Psychologists	4
A. Purpose	4
B. History	5
C. Conceptual Foundation: A Reaffirmation of African Centered Philosophy	7
II. Ethical Principles of Black Psychologists	12
A. Preamble	12
B. Principles and Standards	13
I. ORDER	13
II. TRUTH	15
III. PROPRIETY	17
IV. HARMONY	18
V. BALANCE	19
VI. RECIPROCITY	21
VII. JUSTICE	22
III. The Declarations of Commitment	23
IV. PROCEDURES for FILING A COMPLAINT	Error! Bookmark not defined.
V. REFERENCES	34

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Lisa Whitten, Ph.D. (Co-Chair)
Pearl Barner II, Ph.D., LP (Co-Chair)
Christopher L. Bishop, Psy.D., LCP
Rashida Jones, Psy.D., LCP
Harvey D. Linder, Ph.D., LP
Jermaine Robertson, Ph.D.
Charneta C. Scott, Ph.D.
Anthony Smith, Ph.D.
Constance Williams, Ph.D.

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I. Introduction: Re-Thinking Ethics for Black Psychologists

A. Purpose

The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi) Ethics Committee has been charged with updating the ethical guidelines for members of the Association. With all the codes, guidelines, and oversight mechanisms that already exist, it is reasonable to ask whether there is any rational need for a code of ethics that relates only to Black Psychologists. We believe that need exists today as much as it did back in 1983 when the Association of Black Psychologists first published its *Ethical Standards of Black Psychologists* (Association of Black Psychologists, 1983, 2008). Since that time, a number of African American scholars have contributed to the further conceptualization of Black Psychology as a discipline. Among them, such pillars as Joseph White, Na'im Akbar, Wade Nobles, Linda James Meyers, Thomas Parham, Nsenga Warfield Coppock, Kobi Kambon, Marimba Ani, and Asa Hilliard merit mention because without their groundbreaking work we would not be able to stand where we are today. Their collective contributions might be best reflected in a definition offered by Nobles (2015):

Black psychology, as it is being developed, is the self-conscious “centering” of psychological analyses and applications in African realities, cultures, and epistemologies. African Centered psychology, as a system of thought and action, examines the processes that allow for the illumination and liberation of the spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence. . . African psychology is ultimately concerned with understanding the systems of meaning of being human, the features of human functioning, and the restoration of the normal/natural order of human development (p.33).

Now, given the benefit of this increased understanding of the role of an African worldview in humanity's development, we believe that Black Psychologists have a special role to play in reintroducing the world to an African Centered perspective on ethical thinking. Such a perspective has been overshadowed for too long by a hegemonic Western worldview which pits humankind against its environment, and against itself. We believe that a re-emergence of certain foundational principles of African thought can

assist all of humanity in the re-discovery and re-awakening of its true nature and true purpose.

Chief among these foundational principles is the concept of Ma'at. In Ancient Kemet¹, Ma'at was the principle of “rightness,” or order and balance governing the dynamic functioning of all aspects in the universe (Kambon, 1998). This principle observed that there appeared to be a right order of being that is inherent in all things that exist. While there may be more than one right way, there is a right way for a tree to grow to become a tree, and a right time for a flower to bloom. There are, likewise, right ways for human beings to develop in character, to treat their neighbors, and to structure a society. By emulating this principle of rightness, it should be possible to build a society that is both ordered and well-functioning, while also being harmonious, balanced, and morally just. By adopting an ethical code based on the principles of Ma'at, we argue that Black Psychologists can facilitate not only their own moral and ethical development, but model that for the larger community as well.

Through this reconceptualization and refinement of the ABPsi ethical guidelines, we hope to create a more distinct framework for how Black Psychologists should view themselves as professionals, how they should view their work within the field, and how they should strive to model ethical behavior for the larger community.

In this document, we have chosen to use the term “Black Psychologists” as shorthand to refer to “Members of the Association of Black Psychologists” even though we recognize that some of these members would not be permitted to call themselves “psychologists” in other contexts. The ABPsi differs from other professional organizations in that its primary aim is not the promotion of a profession or its practitioners, but rather the promotion of the psychological well-being of people of African descent. As such, the Association accepts as members or affiliates people who see their work as aligned with that cause. Some of these individuals have other professional labels, and may be covered by the ethical guidelines of their own respective fields. Some may not. In any case, it is not the intention of this document to serve as a replacement for other ethical codes. Members of this Association are still expected to abide by appropriate guidelines that may apply to the professional settings in which they work. But just as the ABPsi claims the right to determine who is and who is not a “Black Psychologist,” we also embrace the responsibility of setting standards for those who would adopt that moniker.

B. History

¹ Kemet is the name the indigenous people used before Europeans named it “Egypt.”

The first *Ethical Standards of Black Psychologists (Standards)* were penned in 1983 on behalf of the Association by Drs. Na'im Akbar and Wade Nobles (ABPsi 1983)². The *Standards* sought both to declare the legitimacy of Black Psychology as a discipline, and to assert the right of the ABPsi to determine who could and could not lay claim to being a legitimate practitioner of this new discipline. The authors and the Association wanted to make it clear that Black Psychology is not merely psychology that is practiced by someone who is Black. Nor is it simply the study or practice of Black psychological issues by a person who is not cognizant of and/or doesn't acknowledge their status as a person of African descent. It is the study and practice of individuals who are fully committed to the liberation of the African mind from the influence of centuries of racial oppression.

The first *Standards* asserted that the ethical conduct of Black Psychologists should be informed by African philosophical principles such as the ontological principle of "consubstantiation." That principle recognizes that because we are all formed from the same essence, we share a collective identity and a collective responsibility: "Who you are is who you are connected to." Based on that recognition, the authors delineated a set of 34 behavioral expectations, or "Principles," grouped under the following eight headings :

- I. Responsibility
- II. Restraint
- III. Respect
- IV. Reciprocity
- V. Commitment
- VI. Cooperativeness
- VII. Courage
- VIII. Accountability

Within these classifications, the original *Standards* then asserted that a Black Psychologist's first responsibility should always be toward the betterment of the lives of Black people, and that they should never seek to advance their self-interests above those of the community. Fees should be commensurate with a client's ability to pay. Moreover, Black Psychologists should commit themselves to give back to the community as well as to the ABPsi. Black Psychologists do not engage in research or teaching that is predicated on notions of racial inferiority, and they are careful not to lend their credibility to other researchers or programs that perpetuate or support racial deficit models. Black Psychologists do actively collaborate with like-minded scholars and

² Association of Black Psychologists. *Ethical Standards of Black Psychologists*. Washington, D.C. 1983, 2008.

practitioners, and hold themselves and others accountable for upholding a set of standards that fosters “racial redemption and cultural reclamation.”

The original standards were revised in 2008 to incorporate procedures for filing complaints and a judicial process for complaint resolution. In the ongoing revision, we have tried to remain respectful of both the content and spirit of the original standards by incorporating much of it into the current version. At the same time, we are attempting to move the discussion forward by reaching further back into the past in search of values that can assist us in shaping a more just and ethical future.

C. Conceptual Foundation: A Reaffirmation of African Centered Philosophy

The present effort began with our committee delving deeper into the notion also voiced by our predecessors, that ethical principles for an organization such as ours should be based on African Centered values and philosophy (Asante 2003). It is no surprise that contemporary ethical thinking has been accepted as having its origins in ancient Greece. According to Assman (1997), James (1987) Diop (1974), and Bernal (1987) Greek historians clearly traced their source material back to the moral philosophies, mythology, and wisdom of classical Kemet. Assman traces two primary pathways for the development of modern ethical thought. One flows from Alexandria, Kemet, through Greece and Rome to be rediscovered by the European classical philosophers (e.g. John Spencer, Freidrich Schiller, Immanuel Kant, and others) of the “Enlightenment” era of the 17th & 18th centuries. A second pathway extends through Judeo-Christian moral precepts that present as either direct adaptations or deliberate inversions of the Kemetic moral philosophies that predated Moses and his connection to the revolutionary religious reformer, pharaoh Akhenaten (c. 1385 B.C.- c. 1350 B.C.).

Our efforts were influenced most directly by the writings of Dr. Maulana Karenga through his seminal works, *The Book of Coming Forth by Day* (Karenga 1990), and his doctoral dissertation, which he later published as *MAAT: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt* (Karenga 2006). What Dr. Karenga’s purposeful and deliberate scholarship reveals is that as early as 4000 years ago, ancient Kemites had a well-conceived and already time-tested moral code based on Ma'at. This ethical code was evidenced in the temple and tomb writings we now refer to as the “*42 Declarations of Innocence*,” which Dr. Karenga asserts, represent a set of personal moral obligations, social obligations, and obligations to the Divine. These obligations must be understood as only different “expressions” of the same “essence” of rightness and not three independent and separate categories. It was this formulation as well as what Karenga and other authors refer to as the “7 Cardinal Principles of Ma'at” that formed the cornerstone of our foray into re-imagining a code of ethics for Black Psychologists. According to Nobles, “most of the references . . . make reference to the Seven Cardinal Principles of Ma'at as the Cardinal

Virtues of Ma'at. . . virtues of Ma'at pertain to behavior having high moral standards and the ethical "principles" pertain to a fundamental truth or proposition" (W. Nobles, personal communication, May 11, 2019).

Application of the 42 Declarations of Innocence

Karenga (1990) offers a definition from Siegfried Morenz to convey his conceptualization of Ma'at. Ma'at, he says, is defined as "right order in nature and society, as established by the act of creation, and hence means according to context what is right, what is correct, law, order, justice and truth" (Morenz 1978, as cited in Karenga 1990, p. 24). Further, he asserts that Ma'at is more about "rightness" than "righteousness." For our purposes, let us imagine that Kemetic scholars surmised that there is some "right way of being" for everything in the universe. There is a right way for a tree to grow. There is a right time for the seasons to change, for the moon to rise, for the sun to shine. In nature this "right order" was believed to be established at creation. Moreover, within each object of creation there was thought to be some force or principle that keeps its development aligned with a predetermined course, so that each thing is destined only to become what it was meant to be. They may not have known the nature of this force. However, it clearly appeared to be at work in all of nature. This principle came to be known as Ma'at, the principle that keeps the world "in order," working the way it is supposed to work.

Karenga (1990) maintains that the "*42 Declarations of Innocence*" represent not just a set of magical spells that one pronounces to facilitate the transition to the afterlife. Rather, they represent a body of moral and ethical ideals intended to guide how one should conduct oneself in this life, not just to secure one's place in eternity, but to create a more moral society both now and for the future. According to Karenga, Ma'at is not only a standard of rightness and virtue; it is the object of man's practice. For speaking and doing Ma'at simultaneously builds character within the person and moral fabric in the community. Doing good and making right not only assures one's own immortality, it enriches the lives of others and the life of the community.

Moving in Serudja Ta

Restorative Justice has come into vogue in what many would describe as a decidedly unjust society. We choose to use the concept of Serudja Ta which is an Ancient African (Kemetic) term meaning to make secure, set right (a wrong), fulfill a contract to restore, repair, make new again, make grow, allow to flourish (W. Nobles, personal communication, May 11, 2019). Under this paradigm, ethical behavior for Black Psychologists is not just about avoiding the personal consequences of wrongdoing. It is more than restorative justice. It is about making secure, setting right a wrong, providing

and fulfilling a contract to restore and to make grow. It is about standing in Serudja Ta and engaging in the process of the restoration of human wellness and wholeness. It is about doing what is right to create a better society and a more just and ethical world. Thus, we say that the ethical standards and principles to follow are *aspirational* in nature rather than adhering to the usual approach of listing prohibitions. In other words, they are not about what you *cannot* or *should not* do, and, rather are designed to offer guidance about how one should pattern oneself as an African Centered practitioner of the behavioral sciences according to the moral and ethical ideals of Ma'at.

In his volume, *The Book of Coming Forth by Day: The Ethics of the Declarations of Innocence*, Dr. Karenga (1990) proposes that the moral dictates covered by the 42 “Declarations” can be grouped into three broad categories of moral concern: social obligations, obligations to the Divine, and obligations to nature.

Social obligations are about the cultivation of moral character in oneself, as well as how we treat other people. In “the Declarations of Innocence,” we are advised to pursue this cultivation through study, instruction, and moral social practice. We are admonished not to lie, curse, argue, or be contentious, to cultivate restraint in speech, and not to demand more than one is due. We are to “cultivate truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order” (p. 90).

Under Ma'at, our obligation to the Divine can best be expressed as an obligation “to honor the image we claim by imitating the righteousness claimed for the God in whose image we say we are” (p. 99). This means to act as we would imagine our Creator, who is wise, compassionate, understanding, caring and forgiving among many other qualities, and to act to create a just and good society where all participants are valued and respected. To give honor to God is more than just to pledge allegiance and to praise the Divine Creator, it is to value and to assume the mantle of stewardship over that creation.

Humankind’s obligation to nature is also one of stewardship. Stewardship is “an ethic to protect and to preserve the natural environment both for ourselves and for future generations, because to damage nature or its parts inevitably damages us in some important way, and deprives future generations of some aspects of the natural world that we were privileged to enjoy” (p.101).

Consubstantiality

In addition to the concept of Ma'at, our formulation of an African Centered foundation for ethics rests on a broader appreciation of the notion of what is meant by “consubstantiality,” as referenced above and in the original standards. As well, it requires

recognition of how the “diunital” nature of the universe is recognized across African cultures (Dixon, 1976), and how these principles would then apply to our ethical model.

Consubstantiality, in this context, draws our awareness back to the shared humanity of all peoples based on a common origin from one substance. Africans refer to this universal substance as “spirit” and believe that it manifests itself in, and animates, not only human beings, but other dimensions of the natural world as well. This sense of relatedness based on a common spirit of humanity finds expression across the African continent in similar concepts, such as *Ubuntu and Umoja*.

Diunital Consciousness

Diunital (or both/and) consciousness reflects an appreciation of the world as consisting of apparent opposites which actually represent separate demarcations of a common dimension. These then support, balance and optimize one another. Opposites are seen as *fundamentally the same*, though expressed as differing manifestations of a unified concept. This worldview is contrasted with a more Western dichotomous notion, or “either/or” consciousness, where any divergence from sameness tends to be construed as diametrically opposed and *fundamentally different*.

Understanding how representations of nature and society can be embraced as essentially the same, while yet recognizing and celebrating difference, is key to unlocking the frame that distinguishes Afrocentric thought from the Eurocentric perspective. The Afrocentric view would have us approach our relationships with others as if those others were manifestations of ourselves. We would be expected to treat others as ourselves, not because it is moral or advantageous, but because we have expanded our consciousness of self to include all that takes part in helping us to become who we are. We share in every success achieved by any. And we understand that the shortcomings of those around us are the collective shortcomings of us all. It is this expanded concept of self that leads to a truly Serudja Ta because it leads us to view others with a real sense of compassion.

Structure of the Revised Ethical Standards

Admittedly, what follows is a novel approach to personal and professional ethics. It is an approach that most surely will require further exploration, discussion, and questioning before it finds either a consistent application or broad-based acceptance. What we have crafted herein is more than a starting point. Above, we offer a conceptual foundation. In the following sections, we propose to delineate further the concept of Ma’at by exploring each of the Seven Cardinal Principles as ‘aspirational principles’ so as to exemplify Ma’at

in the social context. For each of these, we draw examples from “the Declarations of Innocence.” We’ve taken the liberty of re-wording each declaration to reflect contemporary speech as well as *future intent* rather than denials of past wrongdoing. We call the resulting list the “42 *Declarations of Commitment*.” You can find the entire list in **Section III** of this document.

For each of the cardinal principles, we list a few illustrative examples from these “Declarations of Commitment.” These are not intended to represent either an exhaustive listing or a distinct classification. Astute readers will realize that many of the declarations could be applied to two or more principles. Such is the nature of Ma’at.

Following each principle, and its accompanying examples, we then list a number of behavioral expectations to which members of this organization would be expected to adhere as personal and professional goals, and to which we would hold ourselves and our colleagues responsible. Since many of these standards represent aspirations rather than injunctions, they are, again, not intended to be an exhaustive list of what is to be expected of a “Black Psychologist.” What is expected is that you do what is right and just and appropriate given the circumstance.

II. Ethical Principles of Black Psychologists

A. Preamble

The Association of Black Psychologists' mission and destiny is the liberation of the African Mind, empowerment of the African Character, and enlivenment and illumination of the African Spirit by promoting and advancing the discipline of African Centered Psychology; influencing and affecting social change; and developing programs whereby psychologists of African descent can provide leadership to solve the problems and build on the strengths of Black communities and other ethnic groups.

To achieve these aims, we hold that the members of the Association should not only commit themselves and their career endeavors to the fulfillment of that purpose. They also should be guided in their pursuits by values, principles and philosophies that spring from the African Psychological theories we purport to promote, foremost among these being the Principle of Ma'at, or Truth and Order in the universe.

We also hold to be true that the commitment process simultaneously recognizes: that the shackles of enslavement, colonization, and centuries of racial oppression still restrict the mental freedom of people of African descent; and that the retentions and residuals of our African cultural heritage continue to inform and direct the creative mental powers of people of African descent.

Black Psychologists come from many academic disciplines, but they are joined by a common interest in unraveling the mysteries of how human thought and human emotion are transformed into the mental, physical and social realities that shape our existence. Black Psychologists believe that current and future reality can be reshaped through a recasting of how we, as human beings, conceptualize our roles and responsibilities in the universe.

The objective of Black Psychology is to revive for the Black psychological practitioner and subsequently for the Black community, ways of knowing that existed before the influence of a Western hegemonic thought process that has come to dominate world culture. By rediscovering knowledge and principles that were developed to serve all of humanity rather than just the dominant players of a certain time, we hope to re-cultivate the integrity, dignity, collective awareness and unified movement of Black people, and thereby all people, towards their social, political, economic, psychological and spiritual liberation.

Toward that end, this document intends to share foundational principles that might be salient to current and aspiring practitioners and teachers of African Centered psychological theory, research, diagnosis, assessment, treatment and intervention. Moreover, we aim to spark a dialogue about what it truly means to act as an ethical person or organization. In each section, we present first a discussion of the underlying foundational principles at work. Then, we propose for each a set of behavioral standards to which we would hold ourselves accountable.

B. Principles and Standards

I. ORDER

Order, in the Ma'atian context, refers to the state that exists when everything is working as it was intended. In other words, it is “in good working order” (as opposed to “out of order”). A society that is in “right order” works as it was designed and according to the wishes of its people. It works well. In the model of ancient Kemet, even though social order is of human design, the intent of that design was to emulate the order and design of the natural universe. The working assumption was that there is a natural “right” way for all things to be. The task for us, then, is to try to discern what that right way is by carefully following the processes of nature and observing the results. In other words, learning from the experiences of the past, and using that knowledge to shape the future (note the direct parallel to the West African Adinkra of the Sankofa bird, which symbolizes returning to the past to reclaim what was lost).

The goal and objective in Ma'at are to restore this rightful order and then to maintain it to eternity. If Ma'at is not maintained, then its opposite, Isfet (i.e. disorder), will prevail. It is through creating order that we can create a well-functioning society. A society wherein Ma'at flourishes takes on an orderly pursuit of purpose. It seeks to discern truth from misconception and makes every effort to take only appropriate actions. It lives in harmony with its neighbors and its environment. It is able to find balance between what appear to be disparate or opposing elements. Furthermore, it understands that justice is a process for restoring balance where order has been disturbed.

When an organization like ours, is functioning in keeping with Ma'at, it does what it is expected to do efficiently and effectively. It lives by its principles and its teachings, and it serves as a model for other organizations and societies to emulate. A person who lives by Ma'at has his/her house, business affairs and personal self in order.

Example Statements from “The 42 Declarations of Commitment”

- 1 *I always try to do what is right*
22 *I will observe the law.*
27 *I will not create strife.*
30 *I will not act hastily or without thought.*
34 *I will respect rightful authority.*
36 *I will not speak with anger or arrogance.*
37 *I will seek not to offend anyone in thought, word, or deed.*

Black Psychologists’ Behavioral Standards for ORDER

1. Black Psychologists cultivate moral character in self through instruction, study and moral social practice.
2. Black Psychologists understand that ethical practice is not just about avoiding consequences. It is about creating a higher level of moral consciousness in one’s self and in society.
3. Black Psychologists strive to resolve conflicts by expressing concerns/disagreements in a positive, productive way.
4. Black Psychologists express themselves in meetings according to established rules, by not belittling each other, by being mindful of time, and by listening and acknowledging others before speaking.
5. There’s a right way to conduct a meeting.
6. Black Psychologists strive to be transparent leaders by following their strategic plan.
7. We respect calls to order by our leaders.
8. We assure that participants understand the language that is being used in our rituals and ceremonies by preparing new attendees appropriately.
9. Black Psychologists cultivate truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and order.

II. TRUTH

Truth calls typically for some degree of correspondence between what is presented and some underlying reality. We may not always agree on the presentation nor what constitutes the reality. However, given Black Psychologists' mission, we are mandated to seek truth, to examine truth, and to question much of what we may have come to accept as truth.

We believe that Black Psychologists must commit to pursuing truth wherever it abides, and that we are best served by inviting an open and honest discourse on what stands as truth. We hold ourselves to a standard of being forthright in our contentions, while remaining respectful of the viewpoints of others. Ultimately, our goal is not to bring others necessarily to our perspective, but to foster a context that leads everyone to be better able to discern what may be true from what may not. We believe that it is this context that affords truth the best opportunity to emerge.

We believe that truth will stand up to collective scrutiny. The only failure is in failing to question truth, or what we believe to be true, and thereby allowing dogma to escape the test of correspondence to reality. We recognize in this context what is evident across all African Centered thought. Moreover, that is the awareness that "reality" encompasses both the material and the immaterial (spiritual).

Example Statements from "The 42 Declarations of Commitment"

- 8 *I will be truthful.*
- 10 *I am honest.*
- 15 *I will not be deceitful.*
- 18 *I will never falsely accuse anyone.*
- 24 *I will not close my mind to the truth.*
- 32 *I will not distort the truth.*

Black Psychologists' Behavioral Standards for TRUTH

1. Black Psychologists commit themselves to a process of study and self-discovery to free themselves of the bonds of racially oppressive, stereotypical and gender biased thinking and practice. Black Psychologists then use their knowledge and skills to extend this self-discovery to others.
2. Black Psychologists engage in responsible study and research to understand how ancient Afrocentric principles apply in a modern context and to reveal strategies

and techniques for the liberation of the African mind from the bonds of oppressive thinking.

3. Black Psychologists speak truth to everyone.
4. Black Psychologists strive to be self-aware so that we are cognizant of our strengths, weaknesses, limitations, and challenges as well as being aware of how others may perceive us, which permits us to have a fuller picture of ourselves.
5. As teachers, Black Psychologists recognize their responsibility to foster self-knowledge. When teaching across cultures, the Black Psychologist's responsibility is to offer knowledge of how one's cultural identity impacts the life and circumstance of others, particularly Black people.
6. When studying or teaching about Black people, considering the perspective of those being studied is of paramount importance.
7. Black Psychologists always confront the myth of racial classification whenever and wherever it arises, while at the same time using the opportunity to help others understand the value of recognizing all types of diversity and demonstrating how to benefit from integrating diverse perspectives into all their endeavors.
8. Members of the ABPsi do not use their membership status alone to legitimize work that does not otherwise conform to the values, principles, and mission of the Association and these Ethical Standards.
9. Black Psychologists do not plagiarize another professional's work (i.e., intellectual property).
10. Black Psychologists avoid making public statements that may be construed as reflective of the collective sentiments of the Black community unless they are duly appointed by a representative group of the community as their spokesperson.
11. Black Psychologists do not misrepresent their professional qualifications, affiliations, commitments and contributions to the field. Black Psychologists do not claim, directly or indirectly to possess professional qualifications or skills which they do not have. Neither do they permit people to assume and/or represent them as having qualifications or skills which they do not have.

12. Black Psychologists do not identify themselves either explicitly or by implication as affiliated with the ABPsi, for the purpose of obtaining benefits, without being an official member of the organization.

III. PROPRIETY

Propriety is doing the appropriate thing at the proper time.

The boundaries of what is “appropriate” may be thought to be defined by what God desires, what nature dictates, or by what the community expects. Whichever the case, acting within the bounds of propriety helps to create and to maintain the “right order” of Ma'at. Just as there is assumed to be a “right order” which mirrors the natural order of the universe, Ma'at also recognizes that social order is served by conforming to agree to standards of behavior that may have no correlates in nature. Such actions are deemed appropriate by social convention. Thus, in this sense, propriety is a respect for the norms of the society.

However, on a deeper level, the ancient wisdom traditions also taught that true propriety springs from a compassionate knowledge of the heart of the other which allows one to emit the proper behavior at the proper time and in the proper manner. In the beginning, we learn to practice “the golden rule,” or treat people the way WE would want to be treated. As our awareness grows, we learn that a better goal might be to treat others not as we would want to be treated, but learn enough about others to discover how always to treat them with high regard and deep respect in accordance with our ethical principles. Ultimately, the effort is about trying to recognize the sacredness and divinity of every person, and treating them likewise. Fortunately, human history has provided us with countless templates for what may or may not pass as appropriate behavior. We can use some of those templates as starting points.

Example Statements from “The 42 Declarations of Commitment”

- 1 *I always try to do what is right.*
- 6 *I will practice generosity in my words and deeds.*
- 7 *I will not mistreat those who are less fortunate.*
- 12 *I strive to keep my body pure and virtuous.*
- 14 *I will not hurt others.*
- 39 *I will seek to fulfill my obligation to that which is greater than me.*

Black Psychologists’ Behavioral Standards for PROPRIETY

1. Black Psychologists respect the worth and dignity of all human beings.

2. Black Psychologists avoid any action that degrades another person or violates the personal or social standards of the community.
3. Black Psychologists work to cultivate good character (*doing what is right!*) within themselves and within the organization.
4. Black Psychologists take care not to become overtly quarrelsome or offensive in their speech and personal interactions. They do not lie, gossip, slander or become overbearing when engaging in discourse.
5. Black Psychologists understand that every offense directed at another, however slight, damages the social and moral fabric of the community.
6. Black Psychologists take care to respect another's personal and family relations and space.

IV. HARMONY

Harmony is a law of nature. Harmony results when the simultaneous functioning of disparate elements resonate with one another in a concordant manner.

Harmony and Balance often need to be considered in combination. For it can be difficult at times to achieve a harmonious relationship when the elements are out of balance.

Harmony is required in maintaining true, correct alignment with our true selves, our higher purpose, and the attending responsibilities of becoming self-actualizing beings. When we stray from our purpose and our responsibilities, i.e., when our lives are not in harmonious relationship to our intended purposes, disharmony is created and dysfunction results.

Ancient Kemetic scientists were exceedingly observant of the natural world. Because of their interest in mathematics (~~numbers~~) and geometry, they would have observed that there were specific patterns of numerical relationships that not only tended to repeat themselves in the natural world, but also appeared to represent some form of “desirable” or harmonious relationship between elements, geometric shapes, number progressions, art and music.

One might imagine that these ancient learners realized that harmony was not only an essential ingredient in a natural world that worked well, but that they then sought to

draw on the benefits of harmonious relations by emulating this factor in the society they were constructing. We, too, strive for harmony as we seek to create a moral, just, and balanced society that values the diversity of cultural ingredients that now make up the ABPsi, our communities and the world, and understands the need to discover how we can best work together.

Example Statements from “The 42 Declarations of Commitment”

- 19 *I will avoid becoming unreasonably angry.*
- 23 *I will not let myself become hot-tempered.*
- 36 *I will not speak with anger or arrogance.*
- 3 *I will seek not to offend anyone in thought, word, or deed.*
- 38 *I will not place myself or my group above others.*
- 42 *I will always respect that which is considered sacred.*

Black Psychologists’ Behavioral Standards for HARMONY

1. Black Psychologists strive to enrich their relationships with others.
2. Black Psychologists cultivate their minds and emotions such that they do not lie, curse, argue, engage in quarreling, or become contentious in groups.
3. Black Psychologists demonstrate respect for the worth and dignity of all human beings
4. Black Psychologists treat all human beings as kin.
5. Black Psychologists seek to build trust through transparency in their relationships.
6. Black Psychologists cultivate restraint in speech, and do not demand more than what is due.

V. BALANCE

Balance is another way of describing the equilibrium that nature seeks between the complementary forces that combine to create the dynamism of the universe. Learning how to establish and maintain balance between disparate or opposing elements in society through an awareness and appreciation of the complementarity of

counterbalancing forces in nature is key to creating the Ma'atian, or “just” society. Understanding that nature always seeks balance through reciprocity is key to understanding relationships between males and females, between clashes of culture, and the philosophy underpinning restorative justice.

Balance is maintained when we attend to all of our responsibilities to the extent needed. This is not to say that we need to devote equal time and energy to raising our children as to climbing the career ladder, for example. But it is meant to imply that if the pursuit of an area results in the neglect of another, an imbalance will result. The imbalance will manifest itself in an interference with effective functioning until it receives the attention it needs to restore balance.

Example Statements from “The 42 Declarations of Commitment”

- 9 *I will not deprive others of the means to feed and care for themselves.*
- 19 *I will avoid becoming unreasonably angry.*
- 23 *I will not let myself become hot-tempered.*
- 30 *I will not act hastily or without thought.*
- 31 *I will take care not to overstep my boundaries.*
- 3 *I will not place myself or my group above others.*
- 39 *I will seek to fulfill my obligation to that which is greater than me.*
- 41 *I will take care not to cause future generations to be deprived of their needs.*

Black Psychologists’ Behavioral Standards for BALANCE

1. Black Psychologists understand that dysfunction results from something being out of [alignment] balance. The goal of the healer is to determine what is out of balance and work to restore wholeness (equilibrium).
2. The Black Psychologist is always aware of intersectionality - an individual’s concurrent status as a member of one or more communities and cultures - and fashions interventions accordingly.
3. Black Psychologists work to help others recognize that equality does not mean sameness.
4. Black Psychologists work to eliminate discrimination based on age, sex, so-called racial classification, cultural difference, gender identity, religious belief, or any other attempt to impose or elevate the beliefs or values of one group over another.

5. Black Psychologists object to and refuse to support theoretical positions that accept the innate or irreversible deficiency of any group based on racial categories.
6. As providers of psychological services, Black Psychologists recognize that their initial responsibility is to attend to the suffering of Black people and ultimately to heal the Black community. In whatever setting Black Psychologists find themselves, they always offer the best and highest quality of service to Black people. When a choice is available, Black Psychologists see their responsibility as primarily a resource to improve the life situation of Black people.
7. Black Psychologists practice balance in their own lives and teach others how to balance the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional aspects of their lives.

VI. RECIPROCITY

The universe returns to the doer that which is done. The Law of Reciprocity is not just a matter of idle faith in universal fairness. Its genesis is grounded in a deeper appreciation of why there is complementarity and balance in the universe in the first place. It is not just because these principles are good or what we would deem desirable. It is because complementarity and balance are necessary for the universe to work. Without a division of the elemental particles of nature into positively charged and negatively charged components, into positive and negative spin, and the electromagnetic force into what we refer to as a North and South pole, the universe as we know it could not exist. The universe draws its dynamism from the energy of these countervailing forces, and creates equilibrium by balancing the energy of opposites against one another. The resulting synthesis that is drawn from these reciprocal relationships is mirrored to varying degrees in the relationships among and between humans and their environments. With a deeper understanding of the nature of this reciprocity, we are better able to encourage its use toward the maximum benefit of humankind.

It is essential and imperative for the health and vitality of our organization moving forward that each member make a conscious commitment to contribute in some way to the organization.

Example Statements from "The 42 Declarations of Commitment"

- 6 *I will practice generosity in all things.*
- 9 *I will not deprive others of the means to feed and care for themselves.*
- 13 *I will not turn a blind eye to injustice.*
- 17 *I will respect the privacy of others.*

- 31 *I will take care not to overstep my boundaries.*
 33 *I will not practice evil.*
 35 *I will not pollute the environment.*
 37 *I will seek not to offend anyone in thought, word, or deed.*
 38 *I will not place myself or my group above others.*
 41 *I will take care not to cause future generations to be deprived of their needs.*

Black Psychologists' Behavioral Standards for RECIPROCITY

1. Black psychologists first focus their attention and their work on doing what is best for the client and community as well as for humanity, and only secondarily on how they will be compensated.
2. Black Psychologists always explore alternatives to support their work, understanding that their target clients may not have the means to pay for the services needed.
3. Black Psychologists make every effort to share their success and their gains in a way that benefits the community as a whole.
4. Black psychologists work to enhance their organization by joining committees, participating in elections, serving as Jegnas, donating funds, and/or working with local chapters and Student Circles.

VII. JUSTICE

Justice is the process by which Ma'at is restored when harmony has been disrupted, order and balance have been disturbed, and impropriety is introduced. Injustice creates an imbalance, which must then be restored through reciprocity. Ma'at justice is restorative justice. The goal is not just to punish the wrongdoer, but to make right that which is wrong.

Example Statements from "The 42 Declarations of Commitment"

- 13 *I will not turn a blind eye to injustice.*
 18 *I will never falsely accuse anyone.*
 22 *I will observe the law.*
 24 *I will not close my mind to the truth.*
 32 *I will not distort the truth.*
 33 *I will not practice evil.*

34 *I will respect rightful authority.*

38 *I will not place myself or my group above others.*

Black Psychologists' Behavioral Standards for JUSTICE

1. Ethical Black Psychologists do not participate in activities that result in destruction or injury to themselves or the broader community of Black people.
2. Black Psychologists maintain balance, order and harmony within themselves and reciprocity in their relationships and work as they strive to do what is Right, Just and Good to attain the highest standards for their community.
3. Black psychologists promote and protect the growth and development of other Black Psychologists, especially students and subordinates, and of the community and do not commit harmful acts against them.
4. Black Psychologists strive to maintain good character.
5. ABPsi members will be educated in the principles of Ma'at and those who behave in a manner that is harmful to another member will be offered appropriate guidance.
6. Black Psychologists accept wise counsel.
7. Ethical Black Psychologists hold both themselves and their professional and student peers accountable for living by the ethical standards of the Association.

II. The Declarations of Commitment

Moving Toward the Light: Restatements of The 42 Declarations of Innocence

1. *I always try to do what is right.*
2. *I do not take from others what is not mine.*
3. *I do not steal.*
4. *I do not kill.*
5. *I will not deprive others of nourishment.*
6. *I will practice generosity in all things.*
7. *I will not mistreat the less fortunate.*
8. *I will be truthful.*

9. *I will not deprive others of the means to feed and care for themselves.*
10. *I am honest.*
11. *I am hopeful.*
12. *I strive to keep my body pure and virtuous.*
13. *I will not turn a blind eye to injustice.*
14. *I will not hurt others.*
15. *I will not be deceitful.*
16. *I will not take anyone else's property.*
17. *I will respect the privacy of others.*
18. *I will never falsely accuse anyone.*
19. *I will avoid becoming unreasonably angry.*
20. *I will not commit adultery.*
21. *I will not terrorize others.*
22. *I will observe the law.*
23. *I will not let myself become hot-tempered.*
24. *I will not close my mind to the truth.*
25. *I will not be quarrelsome.*
26. *I will not display aggression.*
27. *I will not create strife.*
28. *I will not disparage that which is greater than myself.*
29. *I will not resort to violence.*
30. *I will not act hastily or without thought.*
31. *I will take care not to overstep my boundaries.*
32. *I will not distort the truth.*
33. *I will not practice evil.*
34. *I will respect rightful authority.*
35. *I will not pollute the environment.*
36. *I will not speak with anger or arrogance.*
37. *I will seek not to offend anyone in thought, word, or deed.*
38. *I will not place myself or my group above others.*
39. *I will seek to fulfill my obligation to that which is greater than me.*
40. *I will never steal from those who are departed.*
41. *I will take care not to cause future generations to be deprived of their needs.*
42. *I will always respect that which is considered sacred.*

IV. Procedures for Filing and Resolving Complaints

A. MOVING TOWARD A MODEL OF RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

The ABPsi Ethics Committee is proposing a revision of the existing Ethical Standards for Black Psychologists that would entail basing the standards on the principles of Ma'at. If adopted, such an alteration in how we as African Centered practitioners view our goals and responsibilities regarding ethical practice would move us to consider the ethical guidelines not just as a mandate for what we *must not do*. Instead, these proposed standards can serve as aspirational designs for how we might pursue becoming our best selves as individuals, as members of ABPsi, and in our respective families and communities. They can also provide a guide for how we might create a more moral and just society.

As such, the complaint resolution process is one that seeks to invoke principles of Reconciliation and Justice. In that sense, its objective is not always to find fault or to lay blame, but rather to determine if there are agreeable solutions that can allow all parties to feel that their concerns have been addressed, and that the same or similar offense should not occur in the future.

ABPsi members who elect to make use of this process understand that the authority of the ABPsi Ethics Committee is limited to matters that violate the Ethical Standards for Black Psychologists as adopted by the organization and/or any official rules, bylaws, or official position statements as adopted and published by the ABPsi.

Other offenses which may be violations or abuse of law should be reported to the bodies or agencies having jurisdiction over such matters, and allowed to take their course before reporting an infraction to the ABPsi.

B. REPORTING A CONCERN

Any person who is concerned about the ethical behavior of a member of the ABPsi, the organization itself, or one of its affiliates, may present their concern to the Ethics Committee. This concern can be addressed by:

- a. Contacting any member of the Ethics Committee directly, preferably one of the Co-chairs.
- b. A member may also have a trusted confidant initiate an inquiry on their behalf. If they choose to use intermediaries, they must be clear that they intend for their concern be brought to the attention of the Ethics Committee.
- c. Alternatively, a member may choose the more direct route for submission of their concern by completing the ABPsi Ethical Violations Complaint Form available on the ABPsi.org website and the Ethics Committee's MaatEthics.org website. The form can be completed online and submitted electronically, or downloaded, completed offline and returned by regular mail (preferably registered mail). Members who opt for electronic submission will receive a copy of their submission as confirmation.

Some complaints might more appropriately be channeled to another official part of the organization. Moreover, some complaints that start elsewhere may find their way to the Ethics Committee. The organization will make every effort to ensure that all concerns and complaints are resolved appropriately.

Process Navigator

When a complaint is received, the Ethics Committee will appoint a committee member to act as a process navigator. This neutral person will be available to answer questions and to keep the parties informed about formal and informal options at each stage of the process as it moves forward. If you have not already completed a formal complaint form, the navigator may guide you in that process as well. The navigator may offer advice on whether your complaint meets the ordinary standards to move forward, but will not advocate for or against your position, and will not be a party to any final deliberations by the committee on your case.

The Ethical Violations Complaint Form

The ABPsi Ethical Violations Complaint Form requests the member to describe the situation in which a breach of the ABPsi Ethical Principles is believed to have occurred. Specifically, you are asked to relate as best you can exactly what occurred, who was involved, the sequence of events, the dates (if possible), and

the Ethical Standard that was violated. Any available documentation which might support or clarify the allegations should be attached or submitted under separate cover.

The form requests that the member relate any concerns they may have regarding the process, including the possibility of repercussions or retaliation. The form also asks for a description of the type of resolution the complainant envisions.

Confidentiality

Complaints and all elements of the committee investigation and review process will be held in confidence. Depending on the outcomes of the process, some of the resolutions discussed below under SECTION E: DISPOSITIONS may not remain confidential. Unless otherwise agreed upon, dispositions numbered 1 thru 9, and 11 would remain confidential. Dispositions 10 and 12 thru 14 could be subject to public disclosure. When disposition 15 is invoked, the identities of the parties will be redacted.

Retention of Files

The committee maintains a copy of all complaints, proceedings and dispositions in a confidential case file for a period not to exceed the mandatory records destruction allowance.

Mandated Reporting

If the complainant's concern about a member meets the criteria for a mandated reportable offense (e.g. neglect or abuse of a child/minor or vulnerable adult; threat of physical harm to self or others), that State's legal requirement for reporting must be followed.

Data Tracking

All complaints initiated following the adoption of these provisions will be recorded and tracked by complaint number in a tracking database which will have the names of parties and any other relevant identifying information removed.

C. THE COMPLAINT REVIEW PROCESS

During one of its upcoming regular meetings the Ethics Committee will convene in a confidential session as the Standing Committee on Standards Review to review your complaint. The committee review process will be presided over by one of the Co-chairs of the Ethics Committee. The Committee may invite additional knowledge experts into the deliberations to better understand particular issues that may be brought up in the complaint. These knowledge experts will not have a role as voting members of the Committee. The Committee may seek additional information from the complainant, from the alleged respondent, or from other knowledgeable parties as needed. If the alleged respondent is brought into the process at this point, that person, too, will be assigned a process navigator. The complaint process may proceed in one of the ways described below:

Upon gathering sufficient information to present a satisfactory picture of what has transpired, the committee will attempt to reach a consensus on what, if anything, needs to be done to rectify the situation. This consensus will be presented to the parties involved. If there is general agreement that the proposed solution represents a satisfactory resolution, then the matter will be considered closed.

If either party is not satisfied with the proposed resolution, there are two additional options:

Option 1: Committee Hearing Via Videoconference

If the committee review is not able to bring the issue to a satisfactory close, either party may then request to present their case before a committee hearing via videoconference. This type of meeting could take place as soon as the committee's next regular meeting (normally within 2-4 weeks).

Option 2: In-person Hearing

A second option is to appear in person before the committee during one of its semi-annual meetings. These meetings take place some time between mid-January and mid-

March, and during the annual convention in July or August. As stated above, either party can request to appear before the committee for a hearing in order to further present their side of the issue and respond to or challenge the committee's interpretation of events in real time. The other party would have the option to participate or not. However, one party may not bar the other party from attending. If notification is given and approved at least 21 days prior to the meeting, either party may invite no more than one (1) advocate to assist with the presentation of their case. Notice is required so that if one party is to be assisted by an advocate, the other party will have time to seek similar assistance if desired.

For issues with broader scope or impact, the Committee itself may propose that the topic be addressed during a community *Mbongi* at the annual convention.

D. APPEALS

Appeal to the Council of Elders

If either party continues to be unsatisfied with the outcome of the committee review process, they may submit an appeal to the Council of Elders. The Council of Elders will decide what process they wish to use to come to a determination. The determination of the Council of Elders, if rendered, will be considered the final word as far as the organization is concerned.

E. DISPOSITIONS

The number and variety of potential resolutions may be as extensive as the imagination permits. However, for the sake of guidance, listed below is a classification of possible options that might be suggested to fit a restorative model.

Category I: Dismissal/No Action Taken

1. Allegation not Supported

Category II: Self-directed Dispositions

2. Lessons Learned
3. Making Amends
4. Giving Back to Community
5. Modeling Change

Category III: Guided Dispositions

6. Monitoring
7. Teaching/Counseling
8. Supervision for a defined period

Category IV: Dispositions Related to Membership and Disclosure

9. Admonishment
10. Probation
11. Voluntary separation under duress
12. Public Disclosure and suspension of membership
13. Public Disclosure and Revocation of membership

Category V: Organization-Based Resolutions

14. Revise organizational rules and/or policies
15. Further study and report back

The Following is a Detailed Description of the Dispositions Listed Above

Category I: Dismissal/No Action Taken

1. **Allegation not supported** - At any point in the deliberations, the committee may reach a consensus that the allegations, as presented by the complainant, are not supported by the available evidence. In this event, the committee will recommend (with or without the agreement of the complainant) that the matter be set aside unless more supporting evidence can be put forward. If no additional evidence is presented within 30 days, the matter will be considered closed.

Category II: Self-directed Dispositions

2. **Lessons Learned:** After reviewing the evidence and weighing responses from both parties, the committee may determine that appropriate lessons have been learned from having the issue brought to light, and that no further action is needed to ensure appropriate behavior going forward. With agreement from both sides, the matter will be considered closed.
3. **Admonishment:** If the organization, a member, or chapter is found to be in violation of these ethical standards, and if it is deemed appropriate, a letter of

admonishment may be issued to clarify the nature of the infraction and ordering the offender to cease and desist in the observed behavior.

Category III: Guided Dispositions

4. **Monitoring:** When an infraction is deemed to have occurred, in addition to other actions taken, the committee may choose to recommend that the actions of the accused individual be monitored for a designated period of time to assure compliance going forward.
5. **Teaching/Counseling:** A respondent may be required to agree to submit to some form of teaching or counseling on a topic before considering the matter resolved. Any recommended course of teaching or counseling under this provision will be made explicit beforehand and the criteria for successful completion will be specified as well.
6. **Supervision for a Defined Period:** A respondent may be required to submit to supervision on general professionalism or a specific topic for a defined period of time. Details of the supervision requirements are to be laid out in a supervision contract beforehand. If there are costs involved, those costs will be the responsibility of the supervisee (respondent).

Category IV: Dispositions Related to Membership and Disclosure

7. **Making Amends:** With or without acknowledgement of a violation of the ethical principles, a respondent may choose to recognize that the complainant feels legitimately offended, and may decide to take actions to seek pardon or otherwise make amends to the offended person. If this is agreeable to the offended person. Upon completion, the matter will be considered closed.
8. **Giving Back to the Community:** All parties may agree that in lieu of making amends to the aggrieved party, a more helpful response would be to take some action or actions to benefit the larger community.
9. **Modeling Change:** The offending party elects to display his/her own experience of dealing with the said infraction as a model and lesson for others who might be at risk of similar unintended outcomes.
10. **Probation:** At the committee's discretion, the offender's membership in the organization may be placed in probationary status if deemed necessary until all

provisions of other sanctions are fulfilled. This is an optional provision that may be employed only when needed. Thus, probation will vary depending on the case.

11. **Voluntary Separation Under Duress:** At any point in the process, an accused individual may choose to remove themselves from the organization and its oversight. Any findings of the committee, whether preliminary or otherwise, will be retained in the organization's confidential records.
12. **Public Disclosure and Suspension of Membership:** This would involve public disclosure and suspension of membership and its privileges, including listing affiliation with ABPsi and listing LCPP Certification for a designated period of time from one to five years. Under this disposition, the person will also be prohibited from publishing in ABPsi products, and from attending and presenting at ABPsi forums. If warranted, this option may include a restriction from participation in all ABPsi activities.
13. **Public Disclosure and Revocation of Membership:** Persons dropped from membership can apply for reinstatement after two (2) years have passed. The request should be directed to the current ABPsi President at the National Office. The Reinstatement Subcommittee of the SCES will consist of the current members of the SCES with at least two current or former members who were part of the initial finding of unethical conduct and at least two representatives of the Council of Elders. Consideration will be given based on a) the initial offense, b) efforts to rehabilitate, and c) letters of recommendation.

Category V: Organization-Based Resolutions

14. **Revise Organizational Rules:** If after reviewing the facts of a complaint and its possible resolution the Committee determines that the organizational guidelines pertaining to the issue at hand need to be clarified, altered, or rescinded, the Committee will draft a proposal to the organization to make the appropriate revisions. This action may be taken instead of or in addition to other possible resolutions to a complaint.
15. **Further Study and Report Back:** In rare circumstances, the Committee may decide to suspend the process and conduct further study of the issue at hand, or request that such a study be initiated with those results reported back to the Committee. After review of study results, the Committee may recommend to the

Association of Black Psychologists through its Board of Directors that specific actions should be taken.

F. Survey of Feedback

All parties will be asked to complete a very brief feedback survey designed to assist the committee with identifying helpful aspects of the process as well as opportunities for ongoing improvement.

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