

Edward P. Wimberly\*

## Pastoral Counseling With African American Males

Traditionally, men have been applauded for being more cerebral and less emotional than women. However, this socially acceptable view of non-emotionalism and cool-headedness has done a disservice to men by impeding the full development of an important part of their personality. More importantly, it can impact negatively on their interpersonal relationships, particularly with women.

African American males face the same contradictory pressures. On one hand, they see, hear, and aspire to achieve the dominant images of masculinity held out by the wider society. On the other hand, African American males have faced, directly or indirectly, the emasculating pressures perpetrated against them that prevent them from achieving the stereotypical images of masculinity. In the 1960s Erik Erikson made this observation in his book *Childhood in Society*. In that book he cites the closed opportunities that many African Americans faced because they were systematically cut off from certain avenues through which they might achieve identity.<sup>1</sup> Erikson pointed out that only three avenues of personhood were held out by society for African Americans.

Three identities are formed: (1) mammy's oral-sensual "honey child"—tender, expressive, rhythmical; (2) the evil identity of the dirty, anal-sadistic, phallic-rapist "nigger";

---

\*Edward P. Wimberly is Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at the I.T.C. Another version of this article was published in *The Urban League Review*, 16, 1993.

<sup>1</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 241-246.

and (3) the clean, anal-compulsive, restrained, friendly, but always sad "white man's Negro."<sup>2</sup>

Romney Moseley also comments on the "negative identity" foisted upon black youth because of poverty, racism, narcotics, and unemployment.<sup>3</sup> These social conditions result in many African American men being incarcerated.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the "negative identity" is perpetuated. There is pressure from within the African American community as well as from wider society for African American men to act out the "negative identity." Our society needs a scapegoat on which to blame its ills and today young African American males are being presented as the sacrifice.

One major concern of pastoral counseling with African American males is how to help them achieve wholeness by rejecting the "Sisyphus identity," which can be viewed as the "negative identity." The writer has encountered this Greek figure in two places that relate to Black males. The first was in a counseling session with an African American male more than five years ago.<sup>5</sup> The second incident was in the docudrama "Murder without Motive: The Edmond Perry Story."<sup>6</sup> This was the story of an honor student from Harlem who had extraordinary promise being shot by an undercover policeman in the streets of Harlem in 1985. While attending an exclusive prep-school in New England, this young man encountered the myth of Sisyphus. He was struck by the fact that Sisyphus was condemned to roll a stone up a hill only to have the stone roll back down the hill when it almost reached its destination. This repetition took place endlessly. Edmond Perry commented in

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Romney M. Moseley, *Becoming a Self Before God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> See Gayraud Wilmore, editor, *Black Men In Prison: The Response of the African American Church* (Atlanta: ITC Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Education," *Advances in Clergy Assessment and Career Development*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), pp. 27-31.

<sup>6</sup> This docudrama aired on NBC, January 6, 1992.

class one day that this seemed to be the destiny of many people in Harlem. He too was a victim of the Sisyphus mythology.

The writer is convinced that the Sisyphus mythology is the plot held out by wider society for African American males and females. There are covert and overt messages that push and pull African American males to adopt this role. Nevertheless, as we have been reminded by countless others, "We are not slaves."<sup>7</sup> Nor do we have to play roles that demean and subjugate us. The task facing pastoral counseling is to help African American males, as a special group needing help, to choose a different identity. The proposal here is to present a model of holism where African American males get in touch with both the masculine and feminine sides of their holistic identities. In so doing, we can find a basis for becoming whole persons who respond to the world from within rather than react to the pressures of the external world.

It is not the intention to further oppress African American women by a one-sided analysis of this problem that faces the African American community. African American men are not in any more danger than African American women. The pressure of the "negative identity" is there for every African American, male or female. Many of our women have given up successful careers because of oppressive harassment and the experience of being treated as if they embodied the negative identity. Rather than being responded to as if they were persons with gifts, graces, and abilities, the response to them was as if they had stolen their positions and were not qualified to serve in them. Regardless of their competence, they were treated as people who did not deserve to be where they were. Many eventually leave because they soon realize that their true competence will not be rewarded. Even the so-called "Whiteman's Negro type" faces this kind of harassment.

<sup>7</sup> Carolyn McCrary makes reference to this saying by Howard Thurman in her *Interdependence as a Norm for Pastoral Counseling*, STD Dissertation, Interdenominational Theological Center, 1989.

The focus of this essay is the African American male because the writer believes that his twenty-four years of pastoral counseling with them has something to offer in terms of a general theory. Consequently, the major theme sounded here is that true selfhood for the African American male requires tapping into the inner source of personhood that transcends wider societal images of masculinity.

There is a transcendent and spiritual source of personhood that can be accessed through pastoral counseling. This source of personhood can be discovered and appropriated by (1) exploring the racial and archetypal sources of African personhood in pre-history; (2) attending to the cultural and oral style by which African American males relate; (3) examining the stories and myths with which they identify; (4) editing negative plots with Bible stories and characters; (5) probing the importance of African American men developing the capacity to see the world through the eyes of the women who are close to them; (6) modelling the way feelings may be attended to through self-disclosure, and (7) developing the relational dimensions of the pastoral counseling episode through immediacy.

First of all, there is a theological assumption undergirding this discussion that needs to be spelled out. This assumption is that we are all created in the image of God, just as we are told in the creation story of Genesis 1:26. This image contains in it our infinite worth as creations of God. There is an impulse from within each of us to realize this given image of God that is in us. Pastoral counseling is one means to help African American men to claim their creature roots and their innermost spiritual source. It is in discovering this inner resource of identity through relationships with others and with God that we become full human beings.

It is in our spiritual relationship with God and with others that we arrive at our essential identity. Our essential identity is that we have within us a spark of divinity that we call God's image. It is

in our relationship with God that we activate this image of God in us. This living in relationship to God is the essence of personhood, and this personhood is enhanced as we live in relationship to others.

### Racial and Archetypal Sources of Personhood In Africa

A theme of this presentation is the recovery of the feminine side of the African American personality. This theme focuses on the African American male adopting the dominant images of masculinity and femininity as a reaction to prescribed identities offered by the wider culture. Of critical importance is the belief of many African American males that patriarchy is the only source of male identity permitted in the United States.<sup>8</sup> The patriarchal aspirations of African American males further alienate them from the racial and archetypal sources of their identity.

Charles S. Finch III, a medical doctor and professor of medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, examines the pre-history of matriarchy and patriarchy. Relying on twenty-one years of study of comparative religion, mythology, anthropology, archeology, and evolution, he posits that matriarchy undergirds virtually all culture in Africa. He bases this on an examination of Egyptian myths, language, and symbols.<sup>9</sup> He demonstrates that patriarchy was an inevitable outgrowth of the development of human consciousness related to economic and social factors and that matriarchy lost ground because it was one-sided, all-consuming and unhealthy.<sup>10</sup> Finch also believes that patriarchy today has also become all-consuming, one-sided, and unhealthy. Of particular

---

<sup>8</sup> This belief became obvious to me in a class where African American males preparing for the ministry attempted to get to the roots of their belief in patriarchy.

<sup>9</sup> Charles S. Finch III, *Echoes of the Old Darkland: Themes from the African Eden* (Atlanta: Khenti, Inc., 1991), xiii.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

importance is his conclusion that Egypt and the rest of Africa avoided the split between matriarchy and patriarchy that dominated the rest of the world. He concludes that there was a creative reconciliation between matriarchy and patriarchy in lower cultures of the Nile. Patriarchy did not overcompensate for the abuses of matriarchy.<sup>11</sup>

The implication of Finch's work is that the archetypal and racial source of African American manhood is found in the creative tension between matriarchy and patriarchy. This means that the racial and archetypal inheritance of African Americans is a creative synthesis between the masculine and feminine cultural dimensions. Overcompensating patriarchal postures on behalf of African American men is something contemporary. It was not part of the African past.

There is an abundance of evidence that the creative reconciliation between the masculine and the feminine has survived in the United States. A review of the literature on Black male and female sex role imagery reveals that equalitarian roles and androgenous learning of roles were very common with the African American community.<sup>12</sup> Equalitarian roles means that husband and wife share equally in tasks and decision-making. Androgenous learning of roles refers to the fact of same sex role characteristics between men and women. In actual practice many African American males have equality with their spouses in decision-making. This has often been depicted as deviant pathology by those White social scientists who are heavily committed to patriarchal

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Allen, "The Search for Applicable Theories of Black Family Life," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1978), 117-129; Diane Lewis, "The Black Family Socialization and Sex Roles," *Phylon*, 36 (1975): 221-237; Bernadette Gray-Little, "Marital Quality and Power Processes Among Black Couples," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (1982): 633-646; and Ledand Axelson, "The Working Wife: Differences in Perception Among Negro and White Males," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 32 (1980): 457-464.

beliefs. Moreover, the literature reveals a healthy flexibility in performing roles in the family. This has enabled the African American family to survive many difficulties despite racism.

In some of the research conducted by this writer in 1982, it became increasingly obvious that African American men are feeling torn because of the demands of patriarchy. They feel that they must identify with patriarchy to have any kind of identity. Consequently, there is an overcompensation as well as an attempt to distance themselves from the androgenous and equalitarian aspects of the past. African American males are losing touch with the racial and archetypal history. They are overemphasizing only one aspect of their total personhood.

The recovery of the feminine means recovering an ancient synthesis between male and female. Equalitarian and androgenous roles are contemporary manifestations of this ancient reconciliation. Pastoral counselors need to be aware of the cultural heritage of African American males and employ this awareness in pastoral counseling.

Recovering a synthesis between male and female aspects of the African American male personality must be distinguished from the forced submission and effeminization of Black males by White society. Frances Cress Welsing in *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors* explores her belief that the effeminization of the African American male is the result of a deep seated fear of albinism.<sup>13</sup> Genetic albinism is a genetic deficiency rooted in skin melanization where white tends to be dominated by black, brown, red or yellow.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Welsing believes that all racism and the effeminization of African American males is rooted in White peoples' fear of the annihilation of whiteness due to the dominance of

---

<sup>13</sup> Frances Cress Welsing, *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991), p. 86.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

the color black.

The emphasis on African American males embracing their femaleness as well as their maleness is not an attempt to get them to adopt the effeminization effort of the wider society. In fact, what is called for is the opposite. African American males are enjoined to embrace the African American tradition of equalitarian relationships and androgenous roles. This emphasis emerges out of an empathy for what womanists call the strength of African American womanhood. This strength comes from identifying with one's own cultural heritage rather than trying to gain distance from it.<sup>15</sup> The strengths of the womanist is that she looks inward to African American culture rather than outward, to wider societal images of masculinity and femininity.

### The Oral and Cultural Style of Communication

Growing out of the creative synthesis between male and female is the African American male's penchant for story-telling as a means of creating intimacy. Oral skills are highly prized historically in Africa and in the African American community.<sup>16</sup> African American culture has been characterized as oral as opposed to ocular. Oral is often associated with the feminine. Ocular is often associated with reason, abstract thinking, reading, and writing. These latter characteristics are considered masculine. Oral skills are a carry-over from the creative synthesis of male and female in African antiquity.

Story-telling as an oral form is relational and facilitates bonding. It requires mutual empathy. The story-teller and the story-listener must enter the world of the other for story-telling to

---

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of how African American women have embraced their cultural tradition more than African American men, see Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 87-88.

<sup>16</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).



be effective. Story-telling requires a relationship and telling stories helps to build relationships. Story-telling and story-listening are at the roots of African American culture.

African American males have a proclivity for story-telling, particularly as a means of self-expression and intimacy. The writer and his wife discovered this while doing marriage enrichment seminars with African American couples. Many men were reluctant to attend these events because they had a particular image of the popular encounter group movement. They thought that they had to air their dirty laundry in public,<sup>17</sup> and they also thought they were being forced to deal with emotional and affective areas of their lives that they were not prepared to confront. We found, however, that African American men felt very much at home when they used the story-telling method. They could talk about intimate things by the use of narrative retelling of events. They also enjoyed hearing their wives telling stories and relating experiences from the past. Story-telling about meaningful events was the starting point. Later the model began to explore story-telling around events that caused pain and hurt. It was found that the story-telling approach enabled African American men to utilize a style that was natural for them. It was important to stay away from the forced, direct emotional expressiveness and openness which is the emphasis in verbal-emotional-behavioral models of much of counseling and psychotherapy.<sup>18</sup> By utilizing the story-telling approach it was possible to draw on an indigenous style of relating that was comfortable for African American men and women.

There is a caution in the literature about the use of a story-telling cultural style by African American men. Delores P. Aldridge

---

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Boyd-Franklin in *Black Families in Therapy: A Multisystems Approach* (New York: Guilford, 1989), pp. 18-20 talks about the reluctance of African Americans to air dirty laundry in public.

<sup>18</sup> Edward P. Wimberly, "Black Issues in Psychology," *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), pp. 96-98.

warns that the inclination of Black men toward story-telling may be a camouflage for lack of intimacy between them and Black women. Citing research, she remonstrates that verbal facility among African American males makes it easier to enter into relationships with African American females.<sup>19</sup> However, if their words and stories are a cover for the lack of genuine feelings and empathy for the partner, this often leads to serious relational difficulties. This warning is needed because the narrative oral cultural style can often deteriorate into talk and no corresponding action.

The implication of the use of the narrative oral cultural style in pastoral counseling is that the pastoral counselor needs to begin with and attend to the stories of the male. As soon as a therapeutic relationship is developed, attention needs to be given to the words one says and one's concrete behaviors. Effort needs to be made to push beyond words to the concrete behavior the stories describe.

One means of pushing beyond the words and addressing behaviors is to explore the kinds of relationships that African American men have. Carolyn McCrary points out that one reason African American men split talk and behavior is that many of them are uprooted from support systems in the Black community.<sup>20</sup> These support systems include the family, church, and social networks in community. In this situation talk often becomes a substitute for actual relating. The implication for pastoral counseling is that more attention needs to be paid to the participation of African American males in support systems. It is of the utmost importance to encourage them to maintain these ties.

---

<sup>19</sup> Delores P. Aldridge, *Focusing Black: Male and Female Relationships* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1991), p. 56.

<sup>20</sup> See, Gayraud Wilmore, ed., *Black Men in Prison: The Response of the African American Church* (Atlanta: ITC Press, 1990), pp. 27-29.

### Examining the Stories that African American Males Use

It is also important to examine the stories that African American men tell. Particularly in terms of the plots that exist in the stories. It is crucial to explore whether the plots are tragic and growth-hindering, or whether they are hopeful and growth-facilitating. Undergirding some of the stories that African American men tell is a belief that life has no real opportunities. Often the discrepancy between the words and the behavior relate to a lack of hope and the kinds of tragedies experienced in the lives of African American men. The critical issue to be kept in mind when addressing the tragic stories of African American men is to explore the plot and offer alternative stories that challenge existing stories.

One example is instructive. This story is about one of my counselees whom I will call Sylvester, a young African American male who actually referred to his life as one that resembled that of Sisyphus, the Greek character who was doomed perpetually to roll stones up hills, but never succeed in getting them to the top.<sup>21</sup> When Sisyphus managed to get the stone near the top of the hill, it began to roll back down. He was condemned by the Greek god Zeus, because he had witnessed one of Zeus' indiscretions and reported it. Sisyphus was a tragic figure who was never really able to change his life because of the abuse of one of the leading gods of the Greeks.

The young man who told this story was bright enough. He had a college and seminary education. Nonetheless, he saw his life as one of tragedy and dead ends. What this writer learned from working with him in counseling is that counselees often see their lives in terms of central stories. In fact, many not only identify with the characters in these stories, but also mimetically identify with the plot. This means that they mimic or imitate the plot that lies behind the story. This young man found it difficult to embrace an

---

<sup>21</sup> See, Wimberly, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Education," pp. 27-31.

alternative plot for his life.

The writer formerly assumed that this young African American was an isolated case by virtue of his identification with the myth of Sisyphus. Sylvester's training and education exposed him to such a figure. Others who did not have the same academic opportunities would probably not have made the connection between their lives and that of Sisyphus. My assumption, however, proved to be erroneous. At the beginning of this essay reference was made to the docudrama, "Murder Without Motive: The Story of Edmond Perry." This was a story about another talented youth, a young man from Harlem who was shot down by a policeman in plain clothes in a Harlem park. This young man happened to be back in New York after finishing an exclusive New England preparatory school and was spending the summer at home before matriculating at Stanford University. He had a promising future, but a tragic end.

The docudrama highlighted a series of events that led to his death. As indicated earlier, Edmond's interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus in a high school class turned out to be monumental in his own life's journey. After reading the story, he commented that Harlem was full of people who had the same script as Sisyphus. He also said that they were hopelessly trapped, not knowing how to get stones rolled over the top of the hill.

Edmond turned out also to have identified with Sisyphus. He was told that his ticket out of the ghetto was being well educated and part of the elite. He discovered, however, that identification with the American dream was empty without acceptance and a meaningful purpose in life. He could find neither acceptance nor purpose. His final act of desperation was to make a suicidal attack on a White policeman in plain clothes. The policeman shot him in self-defense. The young man lived out the plot of Sisyphus to its tragic end.

It has become clearer to me that African American males

between the ages of 16-26, like Edmond and Sylvester, are finding themselves caught up in the myth of Sisyphus with no way out. This revelation is the result of my being increasingly involved in family counseling with young African American males who are beginning to live out the tragic myth of Sisyphus.

The inescapable conclusion is that pastoral counseling with African American males must address the stories that underlie their lives. These stories must be identified and explored in depth in pastoral counseling. One helpful way of proceeding is to assist them to explore how the story will turn out if they continue to follow the plot line. Another goal is to help them discover alternative stories that are growth-producing. My books entitled *African American Pastoral Care* and *Prayer in Pastoral Counseling* contain some examples of how to examine and explore stories that have negative impact on people's lives. If pastoral counseling with African American males is going to address the problems, it must address the narratives on which these males base their lives.

### Editing Stories of African American Males

One of the significant means of doing pastoral counseling with Black men is to provide a forum for them to explore their personal stories in light of divine Scriptures. Scriptural stories in the Old and New Testaments often provide a better vision and future hope for many African American males than does the Greek tragic myths such as the myth of Sisyphus.<sup>22</sup> One important thing to attempt to do with African American males is to explore with them the biblical characters and stories with which they have identified. Many Black men, especially the homeless and victims of AIDS,

---

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the significance of Scripture in the development and growth of African American males, see Na'im Akbar, *Visions for Black Men* (Nashville: Winston-Derek Publications, Inc. 1991), pp. 43-62.

have backgrounds that are steeped in Bible stories.<sup>23</sup> These stories have become an important resource for pastoral counseling with them. It is, therefore, quite evident that Bible stories and characters still permeate the lives of African Americans despite the alienation many feel from the church.

The writer has attempted to explore with young African American men the biblical stories and characters that have influenced them. The goal is to help them to take the role of the characters with whom they identify. This is called role-taking. Role-taking is a concept that has appeared in the psychology of religion that focuses on the power of Biblical characters to shape people's perception of reality, to influence the way they interpret what happens to them, and to provide a vantage point for envisioning hope in the world.<sup>24</sup>

The significance of taking the role of biblical characters rests upon the fact that a vision of hope undergirds Bible stories. Bible stories and Bible characters are always moving toward a hopeful future, even though there may be many hardships and difficulties that must be faced. Such a vision of the future challenges the tragic dimension and stories held out by wider society through the myth of Sisyphus. The goal of role-taking in pastoral counseling is to assist African American men to find a deeper reason for living meaningful lives rooted in a hopeful vision of the future.

In his *Visions for Black Men*, Na'im Akbar proclaims that we should not underestimate the vision-shaping possibilities of

---

<sup>23</sup> The writer's wife directed a day shelter for homeless people in Evanston, Illinois, for two years. During that time the writer was very involved with working with homeless people in pastoral counseling. He also worked with a support group for AIDS workers who often found that African American AIDS victims used Bible stories, characters, and songs as a resource for sustenance during their battles with AIDS.

<sup>24</sup> See Thorvald Kallstand, "The Application of the Religio-Psychological Role Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 367-374; Donald Capps, "Sunden's Role-Taking Theory: The Case of John Henry Newman and His Mentors," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 21 (1982): 58-70.

Scripture. While he emphasizes the symbolic universality of biblical mythology,<sup>25</sup> the idea is embraced that those who claim Christianity are part of the same historical stream represented in the Bible. That is to say that Black people were present in the Bible along with all others and were included in God's vision of salvation.<sup>26</sup> The point is that there is more than just mythical efficacy to the Bible; the Bible also has a liberating historical efficacy for freeing African Americans from oppression and mind slavery.

Pastoral counseling helps African American males to compare their own personal stories with that of the larger vision of biblical stories. The goal and aim is to encourage them to edit or re-author their stories in light of a larger vision of reality. In the process of editing they embrace their true identities and manhood the way many of their foreparents did. Liberation for Black men comes, then, when they rediscover the significance of the Bible for their lives.

### Learning to See the World Through The Eyes of Women

In the Fall of each academic year the writer teaches a course on group therapy for African American males and females. Most of the time in the course is given to helping group members to see the world through the eyes of other group members. This is done through attending to and exploring feelings and seeking to interpret how persons see the world. The writer tries to be sensitive to all who are involved and to model that sensitivity as part of the role of the therapist.

Toward the seventh week of the course it was noticed that the males were resisting seeing the world through the eyes of the

---

<sup>25</sup> Akbar, *Visions of Black Men*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of Black people's presence in the Bible see Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989).

women. Many males were not aware that they were doing this. However, once this behavior was interpreted, the males began to be more interested in seeing the world through the eyes of women. In doing so they began to discover sides of themselves and strengths that they did know that they had. They came to realize that trying to perceive reality through the eyes of women added rather than subtracted things from their lives. They began to discover that women became more responsive to them as a result.

Many African American males fear making the attempt to see things through the eyes of women. At issue is the dominant images of what it means to be male and female in this culture. The value of trying to see the world through the eyes of African American women is that it may lead to further personal wholeness for both males and females. It is significant that such an effort is able to restore the creative synthesis between maleness and femaleness that is part of our racial and ethnic heritage.

Pastoral counselors need to be aware that helping African American men see reality through the eyes of women has the potential of enabling them to discover hidden aspects of their essential personality in its wholeness. This is best accomplished in the group setting.

The most important thing that Black men can learn from Black women is how to relate to their African American heritage. Womanist thinkers have helped us see that many African American women find their source of strength coming from their having embraced their cultural and religious heritage. They place emphasis on being connected with it more than with the expectations of the majority society. This is a way of life that African American men must rediscover. Such a rediscovery will put African American men in touch with their historical and religious roots.

### **Modeling Attention to Feelings Through Self-Disclosure**

When the writer and his wife do marriage enrichment sem-



inars for African American couples we employ a process of modeling through self-disclosure. We teach the story-telling model by telling stories ourselves about our own lives. This brings relaxation to the group and facilitates the involvement of the males in meaningful ways.

Self-disclosure on our part is not only meaningful to the group, but also helps to model what should be shared and what should not be shared in such settings. This is important in overcoming the view that counseling and enrichment experiences require airing dirty laundry in public.

In pastoral counseling with African American males, self-disclosure is critical. Not only does it give an example of what is expected, it also presents a model of what to do and how to do it. Modelling through self-disclosure brings a perspective to the group members' already existing story-telling skills that tends to induce genuineness or authenticity.

Finally, a word needs to be said about *immediacy*. Immediacy refers to attending to the feelings and the relationships that exist between the pastoral counselor and the counselee at a particular moment in the counseling process. It is important because of the cultural value placed on the relational style in the African American community.<sup>27</sup> This means that many African Americans are people who are oriented and prefer direct involvement styles of relating. This is particularly important when counseling with African American males.

### Summary

One major theme in this essay is the necessity of recovering the full manhood of the African American male through the rediscovery of the feminine side of his personality. Manhood has been

<sup>27</sup> Janice Hale, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1982), p. 69.

defined as wholeness, and this wholeness can be achieved by tapping into a reservoir that transcends stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity. The sources of this reservoir are the African pre-history of creative synthesis between the masculine and the feminine, the cultural oral style, stories and Scriptures that are used, the capacity to see the world through the eyes of women, and modeling wholeness and immediacy in pastoral counseling. The hope of African American males is to become full participants in the family, the extended family, church, and community networks that are vital sources of this reservoir and of his personhood.

The policy implications of these contentions relate to the appropriation of the cultural and religious heritage of African Americans. This essay has lifted up the fundamentals that shape manhood in the Black community. Valuing this heritage as well as sanctioning the appropriation of it is essential. In developing a macro-picture for the ills facing African American men, it is important not to forget the role of micro-strategies which facilitate wholeness that take place in the religious life of the community, in families, and in pastoral care and counseling. These micro-strategies include Bible reading, participation in religious ritual and activities, story-telling and story-listening, pastoral counseling and face-to-face relationships. Such micro-strategies are building blocks for attaining holistic personhood.