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Recovering Our 'Selves,' Reclaiming Our Parts:
Toward a New Pastoral Psychology
of Multiplicity for African American Women

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Master of Divinity
Emory University
2007

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Abstract

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By: Christina A. Jones

African American women who seek psychological wellness encounter significant challenges. To begin, some African American women have adopted oppressive understandings of what psychological health is and feels like. Specifically, those who have adopted notions of mental health that require that they seek to feel like one essential, monolithic self at all times, in all settings, and in every situation. The problem is that the sociopolitical landscapes that African American women traverse do not lend themselves to this sort of experience. Attempting to be a monolithic self at all times and the presence of socially constructed conflated images of African American women, also known as stereotypes, complicate matters further for African American women. My research found that many women consciously or unconsciously split or disavow important parts of themselves in efforts to not be associated with prevailing African American women stereotypes. However, these same parts may be the very aspects of African American women's selves that aid in their successful navigation of the structures and systems among which they exist and, as such, are a primary resources of strength, creativity, and prowess necessary for surviving and thriving in their surroundings. Therefore, this research determines multiplicity as a more appropriate and liberating pastoral psychological conceptual framework for understanding African American women's psychology. This study both displays how African American women's experiences align with concepts of multiplicity and deems multiplicity as a useful aid in African American women's resistance to the oppressive features of prevailing African American women stereotypes.

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