

EXPLORING KEMETIC HEALING TECHNIQUES IN HOUSTON THROUGH THE  
PROCESS OF SELF-DEIFICATION

by  
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# **DEDICATION**

To God and Mother

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This thesis would not be possible without the great support of my family and friends. Namely, my mother who is my best friend and ever since I was born has been my number one supporter. She pushes me to do my best, even when I have not felt it. I cannot explain in words the gratitude I have for my mother. I would also like to thank my husband, for constantly taking me back and forth to campus at any time of the day and always believing in my dreams. To my grandparents who have greatly supported me and allowed me to bounce numerous ideas off them whilst they listen attentively, whether or not they understood. I would also like to thank the professors on my thesis committee, whom each have provided a different critique and aspect to my research that has been invaluable. I have great appreciation for Dr. Susan Rasmussen, my thesis chair, who has been extremely helpful in this process and has offered me numerous resources. I would also like to thank my undergraduate mentor from Texas A&M University, Dr. Sheela Athreya, who has greatly helped bolster my interest in anthropology, played an integral role in my ability to critically analyze within the anthropological discipline, and as a woman of color, was a great example of what one can be. Lastly, I would like to thank my soon to be born daughter, who has helped me push aside my fears and complete my thesis.

## **ABSTRACT**

Kemet is another word for Ancient Egypt however, it refers to the Ancient Egypt occupied by dark skinned people. Modern day Kemetics believe the Egyptians of today are not representative of the Ancient Egyptians or Kemetics. Kemetics presume that at the height of the Egyptian civilization, 3000 to 2000 BC, the occupants were dark-skinned, and this fact has been omitted by racist scholars who attempted to rob them of their history. As a result, many people of African descent specifically, African American, desire to reclaim this history, revitalize the perceived culture of their ancestors, and adopt it as their own. Ancient Kemetic culture was believed to be very holistic in nature, having philosophies surrounding the balance of the mind, body, and spirit. For displaced peoples of African descent today, this holistic view can help them heal many of the ailments caused by displacement. The use of Kemetic techniques allows them to attempt to cure a variety of problems including, physical, mental, spiritual, educational, and/or identity ailments, all using one cultural philosophy. One of the main ways that Kemetics heal by balancing their mind, body, and spirit is through the process of self-deification. The practitioner raises themselves to the status of a god, which gives them power over their lives and the ability to heal every aspect of themselves. However, their god-like abilities are limited, and many times may not be the highest authoritative force in their lives. Kemetic culture demonstrates one of the many alternative healing practices used by people of African descent today.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>III. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IV. BACKGROUND LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Kemetic .....	19
Kemetic and Healing.....	26
<b>V. FIELD RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Sacred Woman Circle .....	28
Studio of Yoga Center.....	41
<b>VI. ADDITIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>55</b>
Sacred Woman by Queen .....	55
Sacred Woman Curriculum Manual by Queen Afua .....	59
Social Media Platforms .....	64
<b>VII. ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Kemetic Culture .....	66
Rituals .....	67
Self-Healing .....	72
Euro vs. Afro.....	74
<b>VIII. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>87</b>

## **Background**

When I first decided to take on this project, I knew it would be a huge one and never thought I would discover all the things I have so far. It has been so interesting to study a facet of American culture that I did not even know existed. My project has truly allowed me to see the benefits and limitations of research, from both an insider and outsider perspective. I was an outsider because I am not a part of Kemetic culture, nor was aware of it prior to this study. However, I was also an insider because the majority of Kemetic cultural participants are of African descent and because I am also of African descent I was aware of certain practices and idioms of the culture, as well as, some of my informants already accepted me as a part of their organizations.

Kemetic culture is such a vast topic and deserves further study especially, for the anthropologist interested in a worldwide emergent culture. Perhaps a collaboration between Africana studies and Anthropology might be beneficial, as Africana studies may help lay the foundation. Additionally, within this project I was able to see the vast amount of connections between Kemetic culture, America, Europe, and Africa. I have also seen unfavorable academic sides that relegate this culture to people who are disillusioned, radical activists, or romanticists with no real basis for comprehension, rather than people involved in a vastly complex academic, philosophical, and theoretical network. However, the good thing about the anthropological discipline is the ability to view each culture as a culture in their own right regardless of the validity

of the ideas surrounding it.

Although I have always been interested in emergent cultures, I first developed an interest in Kemet after watching a Netflix original series named “Dear White People”. This is a show exploring the ways in which African American students navigate daily life and the struggles they experience in attending a predominantly white university. I related to the show because I had similar experiences as an undergraduate. In one episode, the members of a predominately African American organization, began to ostracize another African American character over his differing philosophies and was thus called a Hotep. It was then that I began to do research on the word and found out about the existence of an ancient society named Kemet and a modern-day culture associated with it. A Hotep is a generally a person of African American descent who has black nationalist views, an American conservative political mindset, a belief in Kemet, and a strong identification with past or modern-day Africa, in dress, speech, philosophy, education, or name. Generally, Hotep’s are ostracized amongst many African Americans due to some of their positions such as, being anti-LGBTQIA, extremist conspiracy theories beliefs, leaning stance toward republicanism, racism towards whites, and anti-feminist views. Although Hotep culture is interesting, I was unable to find many members of it due to the secretive nature of the culture. However, in my preliminary research I found many ethnographic and scholarly sources surrounding Kemet, and realized it was a topic not widely studied within anthropology. For my master’s thesis I decided I would examine one small aspect of Kemetic culture and take on the large task of studying it.

## **I. Introduction**

Although there are variations, the premise of the American education system largely remains European based. The majority of academia follows and adheres to European standards, philosophies, conceptual frameworks, measurements and focuses on predominantly European writers, historians, theorists, scientists, and political figures. The k -12 education system resembles this European basis a lot more than in higher education i.e. colleges/universities. Although education in America can be wide ranging and a vast number of non-European culture courses are taught, this mostly occurs in higher education and/or specialty schools or fields. However, on average, without the election to take a non-western learning course or attend a specific ethnically focused school, the general populace of America receives a western centered education. In the American system non-western civilizations are othered, not unimportant in their own right but, not relevant to America. *“Europe’s centrality has been emphasized in the production of culture, civilization, technology and scientific knowledge and has also created a high-level of perception within various activities”* (Gunduz, 2013).

A very important aspect of education is history, a people’s history informs their customs, mindsets, and traditions. The history taught surrounding Africans in the United States many of times begins at the Atlantic slave trade, *“African American history began with slavery”* (History.com Editors, 2009). Although this may be true, it also implies that this group of people became an ethnic group once arriving to the

United States, deeming the history before as irrelevant. However, this is not always the case in the history taught of other ethnicities within the United States. For some people of African descent living in America, the unknown history before America and the Europeanness of the culture may cause them to feel separated from the place and culture in which they reside. However, due to their displaced position, there is no current recognizable culture to replace it with. Therefore, many may look outside of present-day cultures and examine the past to find a likeness. The more recent African civilizations are surpassed and many go to the presumed direct African source of creation i.e. Kemet, to a culture some identify with that is recognizable, non-oppressed, powerful, and not currently occupied by another and therefore, is allowed to be possessed solely by displaced peoples of African descent.

In the United States alone, Kemetic subculture is shown all over the country. These demonstrations include the Hotep movement, shrines and temples for people who practice Kemetic Orthodoxy such as, The Two Beautiful Mother's Shrine, The Truth and Mother Temple, The White Benu Shrine, and many more. There are also many Kemetic yoga studios, social media platforms, Kemetic institutes, and even Kemetic reiki. Reiki is an alternative medical form in which healing is believed to be accomplished through a transference of energy between two people, through the 'laying of hands'. There are also subliminal messages and symbols of Kemetic influence, such as modeling companies, school names, clothing, jewelry designs, and travel groups. It is important to note, that while there are shrines and people who practice Kemetism as a religion, not all Kemetic practices and organizations are

organized forms of religion. A person who is a part of a Kemetic-related organization may be of any religion, however, a person who practices Kemetic Orthodoxy in particular, ascribes Kemetism as their sole formal 'religion'. Overall, I finally decided to do my thesis on Kemetic healing because from my preliminary research, healing is paramount to Kemetic culture and one of the main reasons for the culture's existence. Kemet roughly translates to the 'black land'. Kemetics and non Kemetics alike today believe that Ancient Egypt around 3000 BC was known as Kemet and ruled by dark skinned African peoples. Kemetics believe that the people of Egypt today are not representative of the people of Egypt in ancient times but rather, the ancient Egyptians were dark skinned or Nubian. Some scholars heavily argue that DNA research, including melanin dosage tests have shown that ancient Egyptians were dark skinned and that Eurocentric historians have omitted this and rewrote history (Diop 1977).

Some scholars also argue for the existence of a black ancient Egypt through the reviewing of historical ancient Egyptian related texts that mention the existence of dark-skinned peoples. Despite this evidence, many Kemetic and non-Kemetic scholars alike face much disbelief in the existence of a dark-skinned ancient Egypt from scholars to laymen. *"Many African-Americans are rightfully suspicious of romantic calls for a return to the past. Clearly what is needed is reality and not romanticism in the contemporary world... Yet one's own past can and must be used in the present as building material for the future. Real romanticism appears when misguided African American people try to build their futures out of the alien heritage of others, as if it were their own"* (Hilliard 1995). One of the reasons for this disbelief, besides racist

ideology, is a powerful black ancient Egypt helps invalidate the current position of people of African descent. In other words, it displays a sort of activism; ‘ethnic cheerleading’ a fictitious idea, that helps oppressed people raise their self-esteem and feel as though they have an identity. Therefore, due to immense benefits of the claim being true, the truth value of it is undermined.

Kemetics see Kemet as the cradle of all civilization. They believe all knowledge diffused from Kemet and laid the foundation for many African and European civilizations, including Greece and Rome. “... *the ancient Greeks traced all human inventions to the Egyptians, from Calculus, Geometry, Astronomy and Dice Games to Writing...Since the time of Homer, Egyptian antiquity functioned strictly as a highly memorialized component of Greek history. Herodotus said it, Plato confirmed it, and Aristotle never denied it.*” (Nantambu, 2001). Kemet was believed to be a place of sophisticated spirituality, scientific discovery, and a vast center of academic knowledge. However, many Kemetics believe that Kemet’s place in history was robbed by Eurocentric historians/leaders and that much of its accomplishments were either diminished or ignored. The Kemetetic practitioners of today desire to reclaim the great contributions of this civilization. They want to restore Kemet’s name and apply Kemetetic wisdoms/principles to their own lives. One of the ways Kemetics practice Kemet in modern day is by using healing practices that are believed to have derived from Kemet. Kemetics aspire to heal themselves apart from western biomedicine, through culturally relevant means.

The majority of modern day Kemetics are of African descent. However, many of them do not reside in Africa but rather, in places outside of Africa, presumably ancestors of slaves. A major goal of many of these groups is to attempt to connect with an ancestry. *“To embrace one’s culture is not to “go back to the 1500’s. It is not to reject technology. It is not to reject appropriate social and cultural change. It is not to reject categorically “Western Civilization”. It is not to disrespect the culture of anyone. To embrace one’s culture is to do merely what any healthy group does”* (Hilliard, 1995). Many Kemetic groups believe that the lack of connection with one’s ancestry is detrimental to the individual (Ashby, 2002). As a result, a culture that is surrounded by healing practices is created in order to fix this damage. The Kemetic person must practice a variety of culturally relevant healing techniques such as forms of Kemetic yoga, reiki, education, and values in order to heal, from lack of ancestral connection, displacement, health issues and non-Afrocentric lifestyles/mindsets. In addition to the literature, the majority of examples of Kemetics’ healing practices can be seen in ethnographic evidence such as organizations’ mottos, purposes, and popular culture. From one of the groups studied the, ‘Sacred Woman Circle of Houston’, a part of their groups’ purpose as shown on their website is, *“We have an innate, natural ability to heal ourselves. It was born out of a need to reach out to women, like you and me, who want to take a more active and responsible role in creating and maintaining personal wellness”* (Sacred Woman Circle of Houston, n.d.). Additionally, within Kemetic yoga, *“... is part of the YogaSkills Method of yoga practice that emphasizes creating conditions through activating the parasympathetic*

*nervous system whereby the body and the mind can heal themselves...*” (Kemetic Philosophy, n.d)

For ancient Egyptian people, the pharaohs (equivalent to a king) were considered gods by their people. To present day Kemetics, the concept of gods/goddesses are important to their culture. Kemetics today may apply deifying aspects to themselves. “... *to believe in ones’ inherent nobility and God(dess) consciousness is not a disavowal of history so much as an affirmation of self-determination to be great physically, mentally and spiritually*” (Young, 2016).

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, there are multiple definitions of a god. These definitions include a perfect being that is worshipped, a being that rules over all, the creator of the universe, a being or person that has supernatural qualities and powers, a being or person of supreme value or the supreme or ultimate reality. For my research, I will examine all definitions but mainly I will be referring to the definition of a god that is believed to have more than normal attributes/power and is of supreme value. “*Not only does the goddess self-create, she lovingly nurtures what is already present*” (Sacred Woman Circle of Houston, n.d.).

My research is twofold, I will first examine what healing techniques are used by Kemetics in Houston and then I will look at the role self-deification plays within this healing. My research will give an anthropological insight into an emergent culture that is practiced not just in Houston but all around the world, including other parts of the United States, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, and Australia. It will bring insight into why the revival of ancient Egyptian culture is so important to the

people who practice it. My thesis will also examine new alternative and complementary medical forms. Overall, my research will explore the various ways in which Kemetic practitioners heal themselves mentally and physically, outside or in addition to modern biomedicine.

## **II. Methodology**

For my ethnographic field research, I visited two places associated with Kemetic culture in Houston. The Studio of Yoga Center and the Sacred Woman Circle. The Studio of Yoga Center Houston is a yoga studio that specializes in Kemetic Yoga. Due to the large role that yoga plays within the Kemetic philosophy, I decided to employ it as a place of study. The Sacred Woman Circle is an all womens' private organization that has chapters across the United States. The background of this organization is Kemetic in origin. I spoke to at least one person at each site so I could gain a broad view of the types of healing techniques Kemetic practitioners use at different organizations.

I performed three different complementary research techniques. First, I did a series of unrecorded semi-formal interviews. I chose not to record my interviews because I did not want the informant to be intimidated by the recorder and I could get their real unfiltered opinion. I spoke with each interviewee for a minimum of one to a maximum of three visits, depending upon the amount of information received. I took notes during each interview. These interviews were typically one to two hours in length and in the form of informal conversation. Secondly, I employed snowball

sampling, in which, I asked my informants to direct me to others in line with my research within their organization. Lastly, I did participant observation at Studio of Yoga Center. During my participant observation I visited Studio of Yoga Center twice a week over the course of two months. Due to the lack of a physical location and the overall private nature of the Sacred Woman Circle, I was unable to do participant observation of them. Overall, for my analysis, I performed level one, two, and three qualitative coding of my interviews and participant observation notes.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand the beliefs behind this culture, I will attempt to do what many accuse researchers within western culture of neglecting, examining African based cultures from an Afrocentric perspective. I will examine Kemetic culture and its healing processes through social movement, globalization, and religious theories from an anthropological perspective using the Afrocentric paradigm. The reason why the Afrocentric paradigm is important is because it attempts to look at the theories from the perspective of Africa or, at least what is believed to be an African worldview. Despite this, some scholars have critiqued this paradigm, because it seems to assume the mindsets of people of African descent worldwide are all interconnected or monolithic. However, the paradigm persists, because overall it postulates that Africans have a distinct worldview from their European counterparts. A few Afrocentric scholars include, Asante Kete Molefi, Dr. Yosef Ben Jochannan, Asa Hilliard, Dr. Muata Ashby, Chiek Anta Diop, and Dr. Ivan Sertima. Presumably, the scholars

behind the Afrocentric paradigm infer that there is a Eurocentric paradigm, which currently places Europe at the center of all studies. This placement of Europe is typically seen as biased and harmful because it places European ideas above others. In contrast, Afrocentric paradigm scholars believe that in order to understand peoples of African descent, one must place Africa at the center of African related studies, although this is not assumed to be a superior view. *“While Eurocentrism imposes itself as universal, Afrocentrism demonstrates that it is only one way to view the world”* (Asante, 1988, pg 87-9). Placing Africa at the center can be understood as having an Afrocentric perspective.

There are many different components of the Afrocentric paradigm. Overall, Jerome H. Schiele narrows down six main tenets. *“Human beings are conceived of collectively, human beings are spiritual, human beings are good, the affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically valid, much of human beings are non-rational, and the axiology values lie in interpersonal relations”*(Schiele, 1990). In simple terms, the first tenet of the Afrocentric paradigm arrives at the conclusion that human beings cannot be viewed as individuals, completely separate from one another but rather, they have to be seen as part of a whole or as one. It postulates that within the Afrocentric paradigm, family and community are not secondary to the individual, as the individual can really only be conceived of as part of a collective. It attempts to go against the idea of individualism that is prevalent in the west. *“Because of the Afrocentric model of group similarities and group “oneness”, superordinate and subordinate relationships would be downplayed in favor of consensus group*

*processes*” (Schiele, 1990). It also presupposes that a collective orientation may not be seen amongst many in the African diaspora due to their displacement. The second tenet theorizes that spirituality is an essential part of being human and without it, humans have not reached their highest potential thus placing themselves in a false reality. The Afrocentric model conceives of the mind, body, and spirit as one and interdependent. Due to this interdependency, if one aspect is lacking all are, emphasizing the first tenet, which says that things cannot be separate within and without an individual, i.e. the individual cannot be conceived of separately and what the individual consists of cannot be conceived of separately. This is in opposition to traditional thoughts in western philosophy such as Cartesian dualism that posits the mind and body as two separate entities which much of time cannot be in harmony with one another. Although dualism may be seen as an outdated thought its remnants are very much present in western medical system practices today in which, “...even when unity of mind and body presents a more realistic picture of the human functioning, physicians rather stick to the familiar dualistic thinking to match that of their mentors and colleagues. Like medical practitioners, patients also perpetuate the mind and body dualism. Being a product of modern dualistic culture, they tend to feel skeptical about nonbiological explanations for their illnesses, as they appear unreal, illegitimate and unscientific in nature (Duncun, 2000)” (Mehta 2011). The third tenet hypothesizes that human beings are overall upright, and their nature is essentially moral. Rather than a sinful human nature that is prevalent in western theology specifically, Christianity, in which a predisposition towards sin is mentioned

throughout the bible, and emphasized in particular sects such as, Calvinism. The Afrocentric model determines that the foundation of examining humans must begin on the premise that humans are essentially good natured. What this also means is that humans do not require rigid control systems to maintain order because they have the ability to control themselves. This self-discipline very much goes against the western idea of civilization, which is orderly, structured, and controlled by an outside government system. *“Governments organize and regulate human activity. They also provide for smooth interaction between individuals and groups”* (6 Characteristics of Civilization, n.d.). The western system typically sees a lack of authoritative outside forces as anarchist while the Afrocentric model sees it as representative of humans’ true nature. *“The Afrocentric model believes that human beings have the capacity for self-mastery, self-direction, and self-regulation”* (Akbar, 1984).

The fourth tenet of the Afrocentric paradigm postulates that the experiences of people of African descent can be best understood through their symbolism, imagery, and affectiveness. This is tenet of the experience. The most important part of this tenet is the idea of affect which is the unconscious precursor to feeling and emotion.

*“...affect is what makes feelings feel. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all ”*( Shouse 2005). The fifth tenet postulates that human beings are inherently irrational, *“...much of human behavior is derived from feeling, rather than reasoning”* (Akbar 1984). In the Afrocentric model, human beings are not

seen as incapable of rationality but are highly influenced by outside forces that sway rationality and thus people are more controlled by their feeling/emotions than logic. The tenet shows humans as highly fluid and does not place a high value on rationality or logic. The fifth tenet does not see logic as the determining factor of productivity or efficiency, nor as the ultimate determination of correctness, achievement, or truth. This tenet thus reinforces the fourth tenet on the importance of affect. The last tenet of the Afrocentric paradigm demonstrates that interpersonal relationships are highly important to an individual and supersede material wealth. Highly successful interpersonal relationships equal a successful life. Overall, the scholars of the Afrocentric paradigm believe that adherence to these tenets, all or some at a time, in studies of African descended people or cultures, are paramount to arriving at the correct theories, interpretations, and understandings.

Using an Afrocentric paradigm, I will be using social movement theory to explain the components of Kemetic culture. Although participants of Kemetic culture do not all belong to structured organizations, the emergence of this culture can best be seen as a movement. Social movement theory attempts to explain why and how social movements are formed. The goal is to determine the conditions that have caused the movement to arise. There has been much research on social movement theory. The research mainly concerns why and how social movements are formed. One of the reasons social movements arise is, the adherents and leaders want to achieve a goal. The people have a goal in mind, something that they collectively want and therefore come together with others to achieve it. According to Zald and Ash, "*Social*

*movements are consciously and purposively structured types of collective behavior which manifest norm or value-oriented strategies for action” (Zald and Ash 1966).*

Within a movement there are also different types of goals, outward and inward.

Outward goals are goals that are outside of the organization and are independent of it such as, certain rights or programs that help the people within or out the movement.

Inward goals are goals that benefit the members of the organization, exclusively.

Social movements can also be theorized in terms of the stages in which they develop. This is thoroughly discussed in one of the articles called, “The Four Stages of Social Movements” by Jonathan Christiansen (2009). The first stage of a social movement is emergence. During this stage people start to recognize something is wrong and have discontent, this is happening on an individual level. The second stage is coalescence, during this stage people become organized and realize who and what they are discontented with, on a more societal level. The third stage is bureaucratization, this is when the people of the movement try to make others aware of it and attempt to get society to change. The last stage is decline. The decline stage does not necessarily mean failure but can arise from a variety of processes. The social movement can get co-opted with another movement, the movement can be repressed by a higher power such as government, the movement can overall fail, or the movement can succeed and have achieved its goals therefore, causing it to no longer be needed.

In the past, there have been different schools of thought regarding how to approach social movement theory. There is the structural approach which says that

social movements are formed as a result of economics or political processes, including social status and stratification. The structural approach is the classical approach used when looking at social movements. A more recent approach is the constructionist approach. This looks at how cultural ideals can form social movements; it also includes individual agents. The constructionist approach contributes to social movement theory because it takes into account that culture is constructed and therefore the ideals that cause a social movement to form can also be constructed independent of the societal structure, the constructionist approach is more plausible in my research.

In addition to the constructionist approach, social movements may also be formed due to survival concerns. A group that fears for its survival, whether it's the progression to another generation or its present survival, may come together to address these concerns. Social movements can also be formed if people feel that their needs are not being met in society, or in other words they are deprived. This deprivation can be absolute or relative. Relative meaning that the people in the social movement feel their needs are not being met relative to another group in society whose needs are being met. Absolute deprivation is not related to another group, just specific to that group. Regardless of the type of deprivation, once the group feels the experience, they take a stand. This also ties in with another idea in social movement theory of adult learning. When adults experience learning after childhood, it causes them to be more aware of the society around them, and they are more likely to try to do something about this. It has been shown that just witnessing an event one-time can spark

someone's interest in a social movement. Social movements arise as a way to meet a perceived societal need, and if the discontented people have access to resources, they can form a group to address these grievances.

I hypothesize that the Kemetic social movement is on the third level of the social movement with organizations being formalized, collective, and encouraging others to join however, they are not as structured as many bureaucratic organizations. Overall, Kemetic culture may be best understood using an Afrocentric constructionist approach in which they are formed as a result of human beings' inherent need for collective consciousness, which allows people to become whole by connecting mind, body, and spirit with a focus on affect, lack of structure, and withdrawal from rationality.

The concept of globalization is also relevant to my thesis. Globalization sees cultures and societies as interdependent, sites of ideological and material encounters and exchange, including for example, economics, and items of monetary value. Globalization theories include the idea that there's an ever-growing global society and that people are beginning to become aware of that. It also theorizes that this awareness does not necessarily cause a merging of all cultures into one but, in fact, has caused the opposite in some cases i.e. nationalism. Globalization theories also discuss how due to the interaction between societies in communication and migrations, the rights of the individual, social stratification, and power structures are more examined/scrutinized by people.

I hypothesize that the result of globalization on Kemetic culture has had many effects. As mentioned above globalization causes awareness and with some cause's individuals to come closer to their identifiable groups. With Kemetics, many are against a global citizenship due to the desire to preserve their culture. Globalization might be seen as a tactic used by European-based corporations to broaden their culture and Eurocentric ideas even more worldwide. *"Leading black cultural nationalists portray globalization as a force for perpetuating the hegemonic aspirations of Europeans, and thus inimical to the racial and cultural survival of blacks"* (Adeleke 2009). However, globalization has also worked in Kemetics' favor, in that they could only have found about Kemet due to globalized knowledge. Also, it has allowed for the advent of Pan-Africanism, which for Kemetics means using the knowledge of an ancient civilization to aid in unification and thus in the fight against worldwide eurocentrism.

Anthropologists study religions in a wide variety of ways. Many anthropologists have developed theories regarding the role of religion amongst cultures and within social movements. For the anthropologist, Victor Turner, religion can be intertwined with ritual practices. Rituals allow people to invoke perceived supernatural abilities that allow them to transfer from one stage to the next, sort of like rites of passage. Turner describes a ritual as something that is both highly emotional and sensual. The sensual experience invokes all the senses combining the mind and body similar to a sexual experience. The combination of the emotions and senses during ritual makes the experience more real and memoizable. *"... the managed,*

*sensual, ritual experience creates and manipulates certain emotions within the performer (Morris 1987) ” (Srinivas 2010). Religions can also be theorized in the ways in which they are used. Janet McIntosh describes the use of religious pluralism in a more complex way than syncretism. McIntosh coins this term as polyontologism, she postulates that in some societies the use of multiple forms of religions by individual’s are not necessarily used to form a harmonious whole, nor that the religions are in contradiction to one another but rather, function to satisfy separate needs on the part of the individual. Kemetics are seen to use religious pluralism in this way.*

#### **IV. Background Literature**

In order to understand the healing techniques of Kemetics in Houston and the role that self-deification plays in this healing; one must first understand the background behind Kemetic culture and how it ultimately culminated into a culture surrounded by healing practices. In this section, I will first go into the background literature surrounding Kemet, and will then explain the literature surrounding Kemetic, African, and African American/diasporic healing techniques.

##### **Kemet**

Christel N. Temple writes “Ancient Kemet in African-American Literature and Criticism, 1853 to the Present (2012) ”. In her article, Temple explains how African American literature is penetrated by Kemet and that much of the literary tradition derives from the idea of anteriority or “ *an awareness of the continuum from ancient*

*to modern origins and historical developments...*" (Temple, 2012, p.130). The author nominates that many African American writers use anteriority in order to find sources of African creativeness. She mentions how the relationship between a powerful black Kemetic civilization and African Americans began as early as 1853, in which Kemet was mentioned as an important civilization. An example Temple gives is the book "Clotel " by William Wells Brown, in which the author is one of the first to mention how Egyptians and Ethiopians were highly intelligent and had a deep spiritual understanding of humans' relationship to god; who created humans to mimic himself. This integration of Kemet continued through the negro studies movement of 1960s and was even made into fiction novels. Temple continues to demonstrate mentions of Kemet and a powerful dark-skinned Egypt in classical African American literature such as, "The Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison, or "The Destruction of Black Civilization " by Chancellor Williams, or during the Harlem renaissance with many novels, theatrical productions, and art. In 1911, W.E. B. Du Bois put Kemet at the forefront of a theatrical pageant he wrote named " The Star of Ethiopia". Du Bois's pageant was shown in NYC to a large audience. Many scholars, such as Martin Delany, an African American abolitionist, also known as the father of black nationalism, have also attempted to connect Kemet with current African and African diaspora cultures. In Delany's speech to the British public he finds much similarities in his comparison of the cultures of Kemet to 19th century central African societies. Ian Smart also recognized a connection between Kemet and displaced Africans in *"western, Hispanic, and afro-Hispanic"* (Temple, 2012, pg. 142) societies. Temple

additionally discusses the large role Afrocentricity plays in evaluating African American literature, art, and cosmology. Overall, the authors suggest that Kemetic orientation and the role of anteriority should be reexamined and explored as a study subject when teaching African American literature and in African studies as a whole and many departments neglect this.

In “ Not a Trophy Wife: (Re)Interpreting the Position Held by Queens of Kemet During the New Kingdom as a Political Seat,” Alameen-Shavers (2018), discusses how the women, queens, or queen mothers in ancient Kemet society were actually in positions of power. They were not merely “trophy wives”, figure heads, or prestigious people due to their association with their husbands. The author talks about how women may have been seen this way due to the European scholars’ interpretation of women in queen positions, associating them with European society, and because of the denial of Kemet as a black civilization. Early European researchers such as Aristotle or more recent scholars such as, Gay Robins or Lana Troy did not fully understand how the Kemetic faith saw women as goddesses, or power symbols; in Kemet men and women were regarded as equals. Alameen-Shavers explains that in ancient Kemet the pharaoh was considered a living god. This article gives examples of Kemetic queens and overall demonstrates that when examining African history, the contributions of men and women must be looked at equally in order to get the correct and full picture of what happened. Women were a huge part of Kemetic culture. By saying this the author is demonstrating that having an Afrocentric mindset or African centered perspective when studying African (Kemetic) populations is imperative.

In “Kemetic (Egyptian) historical revision: Implications for cross-cultural evaluation and research in education” by Asa G. Hilliard (1989), the author talks about the history of Ancient Kemet. Like other Kemet-related articles it discusses how the history has been distorted and skewed against dark skinned peoples belonging in Egypt. It mentions how melanin dosage tests were created to determine the amount of melanin within the skin and that mummified Egyptians mostly had darker skin. Additionally, the article talks about how physical anthropology standards of determining racial categories in the past were not advanced enough, and when examined today many African skulls would have been considered white according to the old standards. All of these evaluations mainly came from a Senegalese anthropologist named Cheik Anta Diop. Diop came up with the melanin dosage test. He also demonstrated that other past scholars from non-Egyptian civilizations had noted the darkness of the Egyptians skin in their literature, memoirs, etc. The article attempts to explain why people are against recognizing Kemet as a “black” civilization and go against Cheik Anta Diop’s findings. The author determines that Ancient Kemet history has not been studied correctly and explains how and why in her findings.

In “The Ancient Kemetic Roots of Library and Information Science” the author, Itibari M. Zulu (1993), gives evidence of how the Kemetic people were very scholarly. Zulu demonstrates that knowledge and information were a large part of Kemetic society. He determines that some of the first libraries and universities originated in Kemet. The author mentions “Temple Universities”, universities that

contained, archives, records, and history, and were places that people came to learn. The temple universities were a mix of a sacred sanctuary and knowledge center. One school mentioned was the mystery school, a secret, specialized, and prestigious institution in which “... *one went to become a whole person, and thus help mold civilization and its philosophy. Its curriculum was a rigid and lengthy process designed to ensure (1) an educated leadership, and (2) peace among the populace via effective leadership.*” (Zulu, 1993, p.254) This article also explains the classification system, the rigorous Kemet education system, and much more. Overall, it shows Kemet to have been a highly civilized and educated society.

Stanford Lewis writes “African resistance: A look at some 20th century African- Americans whose scholarship sought to reclaim and restore ancient kemet to Africa” (1995). In Lewis’s journal he discusses the 20th century schools of thought with regard to Kemet. This article talks about how African American scholars who were interested in Ancient Kemet, were looking at race and differing in their opinions regarding who should receive the credit for the prominence during that time. Lewis talks about three schools of thought regarding Kemet. The Vindicationist, Ethiopianist, and African Infusionist. The Vindicationist believed Kemetics consisted of mixed ethnicities, Africans and Europeans, with the Nile river as the cultural center. The Ethiopianist believed that the Kemetics were solely Nubian and/or Ethiopian. The African Infusionists saw Kemetics as dark skinned and Kemet as a center of African unity, amongst all Africans. Lewis does not solely make the schools differ based upon the believed ethnicity of the Kemetics, but he also includes the role that each school

believed Kemet played, and the historical people of each school. Names like W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Yosef Aa Ben Jochannan and many other names. Lewis used these scholars as demonstrations of Kemetic ideals amongst black scholars in the 1900s.

In “Axioms of Kemet: Instructions for Today from Ancient Egypt”. Itibari M. Zulu (2006) discusses Kemetic literature. The Kemetic literature discussed is supposed to convey important and relevant Kemetic knowledge. He desires to inform people of Kemetic ideologies and highlights instruction books from leaders such as, Ptah-Hotep, Amenenohe, and others. Ptah-Hotep was a vizier or high officer in ancient Egypt. He is known for his wisdom and literature contributions. Amenenohe was an ancient Egyptian author and was similarly known for his wisdom literature. The purpose of Zulu’s writing is to keep the Kemetic consciousness flowing in people’s mind or ideals. *“The mission of this collection is to provide discourse for a progressive Kemetic axiology than can inform our reality as we place good values, respect, and key principles of human culture at the head of our consciousness”* (Zulu ,2006, p.7).

Martin Bernal writes, *The Black Athena: The Afro-Asiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Vol. 1*” (2002) in which, Bernal describes how the Egyptian origins of Greek civilization were replaced with Aryan-European origins or the Aryan model, instead of the Ancient Model. Bernal begins by showing how he developed an interest in ancient Greece due to the large coincidences he observed between Egyptian and Grecian alphabets. Bernal determined that part of the Grecian alphabet came from late Egyptian language. Through historical documentation written by Greek, Egyptian, and

European philosophers/scientists, Bernal demonstrates how Greece and Egypt were highly connected civilizations and that this was also recognized by history. The author connects Greek mythology with Egyptian mythology through gods/goddesses and important figures. Bernal's main argument was that Greece was colonized by Egypt and the majority of Greek culture and advancements were a result of this colonization. He determined that after Egypt colonized Greece, it was later influenced by several cultures, one of which was Indo-European. Overall, Bernal postulates four reasons that the Ancient Model was replaced by the Aryan model. The first reason was the rise of Christianity, which was in direct opposition to Egyptian religion, Egyptian religion being polytheistic or pagan, while Christianity was monotheistic. Bernal demonstrates a triangle relationship between Greeks, Christians, and Egyptians in which, ultimately Greeks and Christians became closely aligned and their relationship constantly reinforced through education and propaganda. The second reason was the rise of the idea of "progress", which during the 18th century was not representative of the fallen Egypt or the opposite of progression. The third reason was the acceleration of Romanticism in the 18th century. Romanticism was based on localism and not concerned with reason, logic, nor globalism. The last reason was racism in which, an Egyptian model could not fit in with the racist ideology of the 18th century, "... *to recapitulate it is certain that Locke and most 18th century English speaking thinkers like David Hume and Benjamin Franklin were racist: they openly expressed openly popular opinions that dark skin colour was linked to moral and mental inferiority*" (Bernal, 2002). This racist ideology was reiterated in the 19th century and on, "*In the*

*first place, no African language is suitable for giving expression to theological and philosophical speculations, and even an Egyptian priest of the highest intellectual attainments would have been unable to render a treatise of Aristotle into language which his brother priests, without teaching, could understand”* (Bernal, 2002).

Overall, Bernal gives large amounts of historical evidence that demonstrates an Egyptian origin to Greek civilization and gives reasons why this was omitted from history. Bernal gives further evidence in his next two volumes, where he discusses the archaeological and linguistic evidence.

### **Kemet and Healing**

In, “Kemetic Diet” Ancient Afrikan Wisdom for Health of Mind, Body, and Spirit” (2002), the author Dr. Muata Ashby, explains Kemetic health practices, eating habits, and the perception of illness in Kemetic culture. Ashby also gives a general history of Ancient Kemet and its characteristics. This book is an extremely detailed instruction book to Kemetic practitioners on how to heal themselves through healthy practices. Ashby gives specific recipes and encourages veganism or vegetarianism. He discourages the use of biomedicine and biomedical views on the cause of illness. According to Ashby, the Kemetics viewed all illnesses as a body system shortcoming caused by improper self-balance. In addition to this, he explains how the mind and body are connected. Ashby suggests that modern medicine has a fragmented view of healing in which the spirit, body, self, and mind are all separate. *“The laziness and vanity of people forces them to rely on factors outside of themselves to provide for their own health, and in doing so, they forsake their own power to heal”* (Ashby,

2002, p. 156). The author lists the causes of diseases to be, not being in touch with the higher self, not being in harmony with nature, improper breathing and resting techniques, impure thoughts, and bad eating habits. Ashby concludes that all disease can be healed through a variety of Kemetic techniques regarding the betterment of the mind and specific eating practices.

“Reawakening Sekhmet: The Experience of African American Women Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse with Kemetic Yoga Practice” (2017), is a published doctoral dissertation by Sonasha Auset Braxton. Her research primarily dealt with Kemetic yoga in relation to sexual abuse and trauma amongst black women. Braxton thoroughly discusses trauma and how Kemetic yoga has had a unique influence on helping the survivors. She gives insight on how Kemetic yoga works including the terms, postures used, and principles adhered to. Braxton demonstrates how this culturally informed yoga style gives black women abuse survivors an outlet and way to heal. She also explains the various ways yoga can heal mentally and physically as well as, how Kemetic yoga in particular heals its participants. Kemetic yoga for many of the women changed their thought processes.

Jacqueline Metcalfe writes, “RX: Aromatherapy”, in which, she describes how the use of essential oils can have healing properties. Metcalfe, references Kemet to demonstrate how ancient Kemetics used essential oils to heal. The author also mentions how English and French doctors began to realize the healing properties of essential oils as early as the 1920s. Metcalfe was not specific in the type of healing however, she refers to essential oil use as an art form and, “*Applied topically, the oils*

*are absorbed through the skin. When released into our environment, they stimulate the olfactory nerve and send signals to the brain's limbic system, which plays a key role in regulating our moods”* (Metcalf, 1996, p. 37). The author then gives examples of how essential oils may be used in everyday routines. Overall, Metcalfe provides a general overview of the potential therapeutic nature of essential oils and encourages a look toward Kemet for inspiration.

## **V. Field Research**

For my field research, as mentioned in the methodology section above, I used a variety of methods to gather data. In this section, I will give a detailed description of the conversations I had with members of each group. I choose a different but related set of interview questions for each individual due to their distinct positions within each organization. I will also give details of my participant observation. During each interview I wrote down what the informants said along with some reflexive notes on the side, which will be discussed in the analysis section. I obtained full formal written and verbal consent from each of my informants. Some names have been substituted for confidentiality.

### **Sacred Woman Circle (SWC)**

**Informant: Sannyazin Heru**

Questions:

Although these were my set interview questions, I did not follow them in any particular order but mostly did unstructured interviewing and let the conversation lead itself.

- 1) Tell me a little about your organization. What is the SWC?
- 2) What is the history behind SWC?
- 3) Are there any specific clothes that are worn?
- 4) Is there a daily lifestyle change?
- 5) What happens after induction?
- 6) Are there any other important sayings, or basic principles I should know?
- 7) Are the majority of the members' people of African descent?
- 8) What is the significance of Kemet to the organization?
- 9) Why did you join this organization?
- 10) Is there an induction process?
- 11) How long is the induction process?
- 12) Can you tell me a bit about the induction process?
- 13) How many women typically go through it?
- 14) Is there a focus on healing in the induction or after?
- 15) What is the significance of the word goddess to you/SWC?
- 16) I've noticed a common greeting, grand rising or great rising, what does this mean?

- 17) Do you or others change their names? What is the significance of the name change?
- 18) Do SWC work with any other organizations?
- 19) Why are there only women in SWC?

Interview:

- I met Sannyazin Heru at a café. Our first encounter lasted about one hour. Due to the nature of the Sacred Woman Circle, being an initiatory group, I was only able to meet with one member at a time. Also, the SWC of Houston does not have an official building/location. Sannyazin seemed to be a sweet woman who at our first face- to- face meeting when I tried a handshake, she reached for a hug. Our encounter did not seem unfamiliar; sort of like I was meeting a person that I had known for a while. This familiarity was prevalent even from the first introductory email, in which she warmly accepted my request to speak with her and was personal in her wording. She used words such as peace, blessing, love, and with the *quote “... stay lifted in all that serves...your higher self”*.
- Although I did not specifically ask her age, she seemed to be a woman in her 30s or 40s, she told me she had a partner, and was of Afro-Puerto Rican descent. She mentioned how she was born in Puerto Rico and her family moved to New York City when she was seven years old. She then explained to

me how she moved to Houston for a change in environment. She exclaimed that she told her partner she was nervous to meet me because she did not know what to expect and did not want to be a part of a formal interview but just wanted it to be informal.

- Sannayzin was dressed in a large flowing purple blouse, mustard yellow pants, a multicolored head wrap, green stone earring studs, and clunky yellow heels. I asked her if there was any significance to the way she dressed, and she explained to me that she dressed this way for multiple reasons, one was belief that color conveyed personality and positivity. Secondly, because the connection with ancestors, African ancestors liked adornments and color. She told me that the white clothes the members of SWC wore during initiation were because white represented purity. She explained to me how before she became “enlightened” she wore all black. *“I mainly wore all black, first because it is slimming, but really I think I wanted to hide my body and I was in a bad mental place”*.
- Once we sat down, Sannyazin brought out a set of materials she wanted to give in order to help me understand her organization. The main one was a book called, “Sacred Woman” written by Queen Afua. Queen Afua is the founder of the Sacred Woman Circle, also called the Sacred Woman’s Rites of passage Program or the Queen Afua wellness center, in its original location in New York City. Sannyazin explained to me that this book was the foundation of their organization and she and the other members followed the guidelines in

detail. She informed me that everything I needed to know about the Sacred Woman Circle was in there. Before I got to any of my questions, she gave me an overview of her organization. First, the SWC of Houston was started by a woman that goes by the name of Dr. Akua Gray, she was unsure of the number of people within the whole organization but with her initial class this year there were five. These five people were spread out around Texas, including Dallas, Lubbock and other's she didn't know about. She told me there were two parts to the initiation process, both online. I mentioned how I saw they had a three-month rite of passage coming this year on the website, and she informed me it was another part that one could partake in, but the original process was online.

- The first part is an online two-week course in which you get taught certain methods, she could not reveal much. However, she did tell me that in this part they learn about many of the things listed in the Sacred Woman's book, do the work associated with it and complete the right of passage. Once a woman passes the part one initiation, then they are allowed to move on part two or the masters section called the Secret Goddess Temple, a two-year long process. During this process, each initiate can only communicate with other members of the group once a month via phone. Sannyazin said the lack of communication was a chance to "*hone in*". I believe after noting my further interest, Sannyazin decided to explain to me some of the things the women learn in the part one process. One of which was the opening of nine gateways, sort of like the opening of chakras, practiced amongst some Hindu's and Buddhist's. She

mentioned how after reading the Sacred Woman novel I would understand.

Sannyazin then told me that she would send me a copy of the novel. I

originally thought she was just saying it to avoid me asking any more

questions however, I gave her an address to send it to and the next day she sent

me an Amazon tracking number that told me the book would arrive within a

day; it did arrive.

- After this I begin to ask some questions I had. The main one was why she joined the SWC? Sannyazin told me that she did some online research and found a one-day workshop that the SWC was hosting and afterwards she decided to join. However, she waited two years before joining because she felt she wasn't ready. I asked her to elaborate and she said, *"It's a lot, you just gotta be ready"*. I presumed this meant the process was very difficult mental and/or physically. She also told me that once she moved to Houston that she found the people to be very cliquish compared to New York City, and she was looking for people to connect with her who had like minds.
- I then asked Sannyazin if there were any basic principles I should know about their organization? She told me that the main theme of the SWC is balance. A connection to the spirit (your ancestral and self-spirit) helps keep balance, and that in order to initiate healing one must balance their emotions and food. The balancing of food comes from eating raw food. She told me that it was very important to an individual's healing however, she did admit that she struggles with eating raw. I asked her to explain to me what she meant exactly by raw

foods, “*like eating vegetables, fruits, smoothies, stuff like that, instead of all that processed stuff and meat*”. She also mentions the use of herbs within her daily regimen was important. To balance one’s emotions she said they do something called Menab in which, once they become aware that they are experiencing an adverse emotion such as anger or sadness, they only allow themselves to experience it for three seconds. After these three seconds they must step away from the emotional response and think positively or look for a solution. Sannyazin also told me that a connection to the elements is paramount in their organization, especially in relation to healing. The main three she mentioned were fire, earth, and water, which also represented the fluidity of balance, justice, and truth. Another important concept was to spend time in nature, and to be as natural as you can. With this she also noted the importance of wearing her natural hair as opposed to weaves and chemical processing.

- I then asked Sannyazin whether there were any saying’s or mantras that she went by? She said, “*I’m not my sister’s keeper, I am my sister*”. She explained to me that it means to take responsibility for others because “*whatever is hurting you, is hurting your sister*”. In that way you are transcending the self and seeing yourself in another.
- Another aspect I inquired about was if there was a certain religion associated with their organization? Sannyazin explained to me you don’t have to be of any particular religion and many of the members are Christian, Muslim, or

non-religious. In fact, she considers she herself Muslim, however under the Nation of Islam, she told me that the main difference between Nation of Islam and other types of Muslims was that they followed the prophet Elijah Muhammed. The Nation of Islam is an African- American religious movement that is based on Islamic principles. I asked about why she joined Nation of Islam in particular, and she explained to me that when she first decided to become Muslim it was in New York City and that some of the Muslim's there were racist and unaccepting. As a result of this lack of acceptance, she searched and found Nation of Islam in which she was accepted. Sannyazin says the reason she chose to become Muslim was mainly because she believes the religion is about giving to others. She told me how she loved Ramadan, a month of prayer and fasting, because during that time they don't eat throughout the day, or in her case between eight to fourteen hours. This fasting is supposed to allow them to experience how it is to be poor and thus humble themselves. She told me that Ramadan was the most moving and best experience of the religion. Sannyazin informed me that like other Muslims, she prays five times a day. I then asked her how being Muslim integrated into her participation in the SWC? She explained that to her SWC is a supplement, more for spiritual development however, it could not take the place of a formal organized religion. I also asked her if there was an ethnic/ancestral component to the organization? She said that race did not matter; however, she felt that it was mostly people of color (POC) because she said pointing to me, "we

*connect to stuff like this more”*. Sannyazin also told me that many people think of Kemetics as polytheistic or worshipping many gods, but she said in fact Kemetics, *“they worship one god but with multiple attributes”*.

- Sannyazin recognized that I was pregnant and exclaimed that a large focus of their organization was womb care. I asked her to explain, she mentioned that womb care included doing things like speaking to your womb, sending it positive affirmations, doing or yoni steams, natural vaginal douching. A yoni steam is a type of vaginal steam in which a woman sits over a steaming pot that contains a variety of herbs. The purpose of the yoni steam is to cleanse and rejuvenate the vagina, some even use it as a fibroid treatment. Sannyazin then asked me if I felt connected to my daughter in my womb? I explained to her that I did in a way but not really. She told me that I probably had let some bad spirits enter my womb. These spirits she said can come in the form of men, i.e. all the men that one lets penetrate them could cause them to have leftover bad spirits and damage the womb environment. She told me that she was a teen mom, and her mother was abusive. Because of this she was confused and had trouble connecting to her womb. She recommended that I read a book named, *“Overcoming the Angry Vagina: Journey to Womb Wellness”* by Queen Afua. Sannyazin told me this would allow me to get rid of any bad spirits and help me find a connection with my baby. She also told me to read page 301 in the Sacred Woman’s book she would send me and that it would greatly pertain to my situation. I would later discover that this page was the beginning of a

chapter on motherhood, and each section focused on how to cultivate good relationships. These sections included improving relationships between mother and father, mother and daughter, mother and son and vice versa. The chapter also praised the womanness of motherhood, and the great task it is, *“As a mother giving birth, you are given the opportunity to be an active part of Creation, to experience the volcano like eruption of the earth within you as you crack open into your power”* (Afua 2001).

- I then proceeded to ask Sannyazin about her personal relationship and/or SWC relationship to Kemet? She told me that both her and the SWC live by the teachings of the ancient Kemetics. This especially applied when it came to healing because, *“our ancestors did not use bio-medicines”*. I then asked her if she did or did not use modern biomedicine? She informed me that she does if she must; however, if she can find a more natural remedy, she uses it. Sannyazin believes that biomedicines heal however, they also adversely cause dependence, on both the medicines and the pharmaceutical companies. In addition to biomedicines and natural remedies Sannyazin also informed me that she sees a therapist (counselor) often. She believes her therapist aids her because he understands how she thinks and advises her based upon her own philosophies, i.e. Kemet and SWC.
- My next question had to do with her name. Sannyazin Heru. I figured it was not her real name or at least parts of it, because some it seemed to have an Egyptian origin. I presumed the Egypt part had to do with her association to

Kemet. Overall, she told me there were many aspects to her name change. Sometimes after completing both parts of initiation in the SWC the member is allowed to acquire a new name however, Sannyazin had actually chosen a new name for herself before joining the SWC. However, she only legally changed her name after Dr. Akua, the leader, deemed her ready for it. She then explained the history behind her name. When Sannyazin was a child back in Puerto Rico, her grandmother gave her and her siblings each a gold bracelet with a black round ball on the top. Although she did not recognize it at the time, the black ball on the top represented the eye of Horus. Her grandmother wanted to protect her grandchildren from evil. Horus was also known as Heru and thus she chose it for her second name because she felt that Heru had been with her all her life, even though she only recently recognized it. Sannyazin explained that her first name came from a mix of Sayza, a form of yoga she participated in, and that she added zin because she liked it. Thus, the name Sannyazin Heru was created.

- Sannyazin and I resumed our interview the following day in the same location.
- I recognized a largely individualistic and eclectic lifestyle that she led and proceeded to ask her what things she did in particular in her daily routine?

Sannyazin then said something unexpected, *“A lot of people of color, what we believe, what were we told, keeps us prisoner in our minds”*. She said this in an attempt to get me to understand something that she does as part of her daily routine, street ministries. In her ministries she tries to enlighten POC about

their Kemet ancestral connection and give them spiritual education.

Additionally, in her daily routine she makes a point to not look at her phone in the morning until an hour after rising and during this time she meditates. I asked her if she meditates in silence. Sannyazin informed me that she personally meditates to House music, a kind of electronic dance music with a steady tempo, for about 15-20 minutes. However, Sannyazin relays that meditation styles are different for everyone and it is really about what speaks to you individually. In addition to listening to House music, she performs her meditation in front of an altar. I asked if her altar was in reverence to a specific person/being, and she said to look inside the Sacred Woman's book for details. To push the conversation along, I told her that I struggled with not looking at my phone in the morning and not having it next to me constantly. Sannyazin looked intrigued and asked me where I thought my phone addiction stemmed from? I told her perhaps as a result of me being a millennial or not wanting to deal with the quietness in life which caused me to overthink. She told me that mediation would aid me and help heal my addiction, as she called it.

Sannyazin also recommended taking a sacred bath. Another part of her daily routine was taking, what she calls "sacred baths" every day. I inquired more but she did not explain. Although not daily, Sannyazin does Kemetic yoga and occasionally other forms of yoga. *"Yoga has been with me for a long time"*.

One of the main things she does daily is "wudu". Wudu is a common Islamic procedure of ritual purification, which involves cleansing of the body.

Sannyazin, also mentions that her use of wudu involves smudging, cleansing the surrounding space by burning herbs.

- The next question I asked pertained to her use of words. One common phrase used in emails to me by both her and Dr. Akua was the greeting of ‘grand rising’ in the place of hello. I asked her the significance and was informed that the phrase is used as a positive way to greet someone. The phrase resembles the common use of the words peace or blessing because they *all “spoke life into someone”* or used as positive affirmation.
- Sannyazin and I continued our conversation by discussing her thoughts surrounding the word god/goddess. I wanted to know if this word was significant to her. Sannyazin mentioned to me that she does call herself a goddess. She explains how many POC use the terms Queen or King when referring to each other and it is great; however, she doesn’t use it herself because, *“there is no limit in being a goddess, however, there is a limit to being a queen”*. Sannyazin explains how she feels she is much more than a Queen and that everyone is a god or goddess because, *“we are all divine, because god gave us life”*. Because of my interests and after finding out her position on gods/goddesses, I asked her whether she thought healing came from within or without? Sannyazin told me that to her healing comes from within, through work, and connecting with Kemetic ancestors. I then asked her if she could extend her healing to others, for example if asked could she heal

me? She told me she could not, that she could give me the tools but only I could heal myself, that everyone is a healer and healing is within.

- Lastly, I asked her if she knew if her organization worked with any others? She told me she did not know, but that Dr. Akua probably does. I also inquired as to why the organization only consist of women? She informed me that she believes men have their own organization but ultimately, she does not know why.
- Sannyazin and I ended the interview with a hug and I informed her of my appreciation to her for speaking with me. She told me I should consider joining the organization and subscribing to Dr. Akua's newsletter, "Life of Peace", to get updates. I told her I would consider it. In the time after the interview we often exchange messages, in which she sends me positive quotes, recommendations, or affirmations.

## **Studio of Yoga Center (YC)**

Participant observation:

Studio of Yoga Center is a yoga studio located in the historic third ward neighborhood of Houston. Third ward has a very strong African American historical background and culture. The studio is a one room workshop, in a parking strip next to a gym. When I first walked in, I immediately noticed the strong smell of incense; however, I could not tell which kind. To my immediate right I saw a black leather couch and to my left was the yoga instructor sitting atop a bar stool. The music was

unrecognizable to me, sort of like a mix between African drum instrumentals, and a piano. It felt very much like a place of ritual. The walls were dark in color, and there were three participants at the time. Each person was on a yoga mat in a head down position. The interior was quite hot and actually felt a bit suffocating. I spoke with the instructor/owner of the studio and she told me that the majority of classes they held were hot yoga, yoga performed in a temperature over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, in order to promote sweating. I decided to come back and take a non-hot Kemetic yoga class, which were given three times a week, due to my condition.

My first official class was on a Saturday. I walked in and was greeted by the instructor/owner of the studio. She told me to choose any spot and place my mat on the ground. The music was average to loud volume and this time reggae style. There were about seven other participants. The class lasted around 45 minutes and at the beginning she told everyone to lie on their mats and breathe, this lasted for about 10 minutes. Then the instructor took us through a series of poses that were about one minute each. I recognized these poses as mimicking Egyptian hieroglyphics from my preliminary research. At the end of the class, the instructor told us to lie down once again and “*focus on your breathe*”. Breathing was a big part of the class and the majority of the people seemed like experts with the poses. The hardest thing about the poses was attempting to stay in the position. Although each pose contained stretching as in Indian style yoga, there was not much individual variation to the poses and each one required a strong amount of physical stability.

I continued coming to the non-hot Kemetic yoga days over the course of a

month and a half. The number of people in the classes varied from as little as three to as much as twelve. The instructors sometimes varied but mainly, the owner of the studio of taught class. I found myself becoming more flexible, energetic, and patient. I also found myself drinking green drinks, most likely because it was talked about by some other members of the class. Although, I am not sure whether I was feeling a spiritual component to the class.

**Informant: DENISE (YC)**

**Interview:**

- I first met Denise after walking into the YC studio. She was a woman of African descent, specifically she seemed to be African American. She wore typical yoga style clothes, pink tank and navy-blue yoga capris. Her hair consisted of long brown dreads. She greeted me with a hello and was actually in the middle of teaching a class. Nonetheless, she allowed me to speak to her about my research during a period of breathing that the yoga participants were doing. She then said she would be happy to speak with me, gave me her number, and told me to call her later after she finished teaching. Denise finished teaching around 9pm. I called her and we set up a time to meet. However, due to her busy schedule she preferred if we met via phone, to which I agreed.
- At the start of our conversation I asked her if she started YC? Denise mentioned that she did in 2010. She told me that from that time until now, she

has been in three different locations, *“first on Mykawa and Bellfort, then in 2011 on Alameda for eight years, and now we are at our current location since January 1st”*.

- I then asked Denise how long she has taught Kemetic yoga? She informed me that she taught various Indian forms of yoga for over nine years. The first and most prevalent form she taught was Hopi yoga, then she switched to Kemetic and has been teaching it for seven years. Overall, she has been practicing yoga herself for around fifteen years. Denise explained to me that she practices Kemetic yoga daily, especially with her teaching of the classes. The majority of the day she teaches from a distance but usually chooses one class to participate in yoga, generally a class with long- time students that already know what to do. *“I at least try to do some breathing or one salutation, get an hour a day”*.
- I then asked how, in her opinion, Kemetic yoga differed from other yoga types? I informed her that I had read about Kemetic yoga and watched a few videos but, I wanted to know from an instructor's perspective. Denise told me that the main difference was in the delivery. I asked her to elaborate. She then explained that Kemetic yoga is based upon a number of things such as, deep breathing, cultivating/moving energy. *“... it is a regenerative system, reduces system, helps blood circulation, and main internal life energy and cerebral spinal fluid through movements that align the spine”*. She also said there was a difference in the postures and that Kemetic yoga postures were based on

Egyptian hieroglyphs which is solely in Kemetic yoga. Kemetic yoga may also include Indian yoga postures or as she called it, "*universal postures*". She then re-emphasized that Kemetic yoga focuses on the parasympathetic nervous system, allows the body to relax, and helps the mind to become stress free thus heal. Denise said that Kemetic yoga is a mix of breathing and healing energy and "*works from the inside out*". She says that what she likes about Kemetic yoga is that the ability to take your time and most of the yoga industry today is very fast-paced and commercial. Denise felt that in non-Kemetic classes you can get a good workout but, not the other benefits that you are supposed to get because of the rushed classes. I then asked her about whether she felt Kemetic yoga in particular had healing properties? I noted that she already mentioned above. She said that the Kemetic part makes the yoga become more healing due to the addition of the breath and slowness.

- I then asked Denise if she thought of herself as Kemetic or associated with Kemet in any way? She said that she doesn't specifically; however, she goes along with the principles and philosophies for living, mainly due to it being in line with Kemetic yoga. She also felt that the hieroglyphics were the blueprints of how she was supposed to live. She told me that she didn't wear head wraps and the ankh symbol, "*because I didn't grow up that way*". Denise was born in Port Arthur, Texas and adornments were not something she identified with. I asked if her dreads were related to her upbringing? Denise informed that she really connected with the 60s and the idea of being 'black

and proud' which is why she wore dreads. *"I always wore natural hair and been a natural type person"*.

- Continuing the conversation, I asked Denise if she had any Kemetetic practices besides yoga that she did at home such as, eating raw or meditating? She told me that she meditates as a part of her yoga and she had been a vegan for a long period in her life. However, she explained that now yoga tells her to listen to her body and she allows her body to tell her what it needs. Denise stepped away from the vegan diet because she has been anemic since high school and with being vegan, she ended up having to take a lot of iron supplements. She did not like taking supplements in her diet and felt it was less natural. *"I decided to use the occasional meat as medicine instead of supplements"*. Denise also mentioned that being vegan did not allow her to perform her best especially during hot yoga. She learned about eating good fruit and maintaining a raw diet from her first trip to Jamaica in which she was teaching a Kemetetic yoga workshop. To Denise the food in Jamaica was good and she mainly ate fruits and vegetables. After her first day eating in Jamaica, she didn't eat for three days because she felt full. Denise explained that during her time in Jamaica she felt so good. *"In the U.S. fruit is not right, (in Jamaica) my body felt like butter, no aches, I was limber and flexible"*.
- I was intrigued to see if Denise had any mantras or saying that she went by. The one she used the most was to, *"follow your heart"*. She said this saying is something she frequently tells her students and anyone who asks for her

advice. She explained that she believes your heart will always lead you to the right answer.

- I then asked Denise if she associated herself with any particular religion? She told me that she grew up Catholic, attended a Catholic school and later in her life became Methodist. However, as of now she is not in any particular religion but, she does believe there is a God. Denise says the main reason she does not ascribe to any one religion is because she believes all religions originated from the same source and were spread out over time. She attributed the differentiation to who she called, "*minstrels*", or storytellers, who told different stories about the same religion in different ways. Overall, Denise believes, "*we are all god, we are all energy*". She says that her practice of Kemetic yoga brings her closer to divinity and strengthens her spirituality.
- Lastly, I asked if she felt that healing came from within or without. Denise expressed that she believed healing comes from within, mainly from what one puts in their body, i.e. the foods eaten. She said that participating in any kind yoga forces a person to change their diet otherwise they "*torture themselves*" by eating badly. If one eats bad while practicing yoga, they will be more sluggish. She mentions that yoga is a disciplining practice. She says that it is important to eat a clean diet however, "*too much of anything is not a good thing*". Denise says overall in order to heal one must listen to the universe. "*The universe works in mysterious ways and knows what you need*". I then asked her about any books that she reads. She told me to check out "Ancient

Future" by Wayne Chandler, a book which, "... celebrates the wisdom of those ancient civilizations that did not disassociate the philosophical, spiritual, and material realms of life. This book is an attempt to recreate this holistic experience in hopes that a synthesized view of life will become of the twenty first century" (Chandler, 2000)

**Informant: SHEILA (YC)**

**Interview:**

- While I was taking a class at YC, I met a young woman named Sheila. Sheila and I were both laughing at me while I was trying to get into one of the yoga poses, and after the class we began talking. She informed me how hard it was for her in the beginning as well. I told her my purpose in visiting the studio and then asked if she might be willing to chat a bit about her experiences, we exchanged phone numbers and I informed her a bit more about my project. We then decided to meet at a restaurant in the area after the next class.
- When Sheila first walked in the restaurant, she was wearing a long colorful skirt, consisting of blue, pink, and white, and a white short sleeved blouse. Sheila is a woman of African descent, with a light complexion and medium length black dreads. She later informed me that she was creole and born in Lafayette, Louisiana. Around her wrist she had a set of two black beaded bracelets.

- I began the conversation by asking her how long she had been practicing Kemetic yoga? She told me she had been practicing for about two years; the majority of the first two years at home and then at the studio for a few months. I asked Sheila how she discovered the studio and she told me that she actually looked up Kemetic yoga in Houston, she didn't think she would find anything but, to her surprise YC came up. She then started visiting regularly, about twice a week. Sheila tries to do yoga almost every day, between her home and the studio however, she normally only does it about 4-5 times a week. I then asked her why she chose Kemetic yoga instead of Indian- style yoga? She told me that she was on the internet researching, she could not recall the exact topic, and she saw some 'black' people doing yoga, she found the name and decided she would participate. *"I have always been about black people and black things, and when I saw the yoga, I was like, oh yea I'm definitely doing this"*. Sheila told me that she had learned so much about people of African descent from the internet, *"you know they burned all the Egyptian libraries, so we couldn't read anything about them"*. She then told me how Kemetic yoga makes her feel good and helps her with her anger issues. I inquired more, and she told me how she has always had anger issues that mostly stemmed from her childhood. She told me how she was never really able to express herself around her family, *"my mom and brother always called me too sensitive"* as a result she expressed herself through anger. I asked her specifically how

Kemetic yoga helped her with anger and she told me that by breathing and mediating she has been calmer and applies this to other things in her life.

- I asked Sheila if she knew what Kemet or Kemetism was? She said that she did, and that to her knowledge Kemet was split into two halves. The upper half was known as Nubia and the bottom known as Kush. I then asked her if she identified herself as a Kemetic? She told me that she did not identify herself as Kemetic; however, she does believe that the civilization started all religion, *“like the ten commandments came from the 42 laws of Ma’at”*, Or that Kemet started the idea of plant based fasting, Ramadan, etc. and that each major religion has beliefs and practices deriving from Kemet. However, she doesn’t identify solely because she is Catholic.
- I then asked Sheila if she felt she had any health problems? I told her she did not have to go into specifics but just generally. Sheila told me she had mental and physical health problems. I asked her in what ways did she heal her health problems, did she use a health care provider, hospital doctor, at home care, or a type of alternative or complementary medicine? She informed me that she uses alternative medicine and that her doctor is in Jamaica. I was amazed by this and asked her why her doctor was in Jamaica. Sheila explained that she and her boyfriend periodically visit Jamaica to see his family. One day when she was in Jamaica, she was having back problems, she traced the cause of these back problems to an accident on her high school swim team, her medicine prescribed by her doctor in the U.S. was not helping and hadn’t been

for a while. Sheila decided to ask her boyfriend's mother if she knew anyone who could help, and she recommended a visit to a doctor nearby. When Sheila went to the doctor, she realized that the doctor practiced holistic medicine and gave her a herbal mix to put on her back. This mix of herbs helped her immensely, and ever since then she has used the Jamaican physician as her primary doctor and sees her whenever she visits. I asked if her doctor had recommended any other remedies? She said that her doctor has taught her many things, *“like physiological and mental stuff, mainly bowel movement, like regulating your digestive system, did you know the digestive system plays a large role in our health?”* Sheila told me she has taken many of the alternative medical practices she learns from her Jamaican doctor back to her home in the U.S.

- Sheila has lots of herbal tinctures and a mixing station full of herbs. I inquired as to which herbs, and she informed me that she uses a wide mix including sage, thyme, and basil. She mostly blends the herbs together for making teas, which help with her anxiety and back pain or to make products for her dreads. I asked her why she got dreads? Sheila informed me she got them about a year ago because *“I just felt more like myself with them, my boyfriend liked them to so why not”*. Sheila told me that she only wraps her hair when she meditates. I asked her why and she gave me two reasons. The first was because whenever she didn't wrap her hair when mediating *“bad energy would come to me”*. After not wrapping her hair she would have a bad day. One day her boyfriend

made a joke, “*your dreads are like antennas*”, although he was joking, she thought about all the bad days she had when she did not wrap her hair and concluded that perhaps he was right. She then believed her dreads acted as antennae, kind of like conduits, that sent the bad energy from the world into her mind and spirit rendering her meditation ineffective. The second reason she only wore her dreads while mediating was because in her Louisiana culture, a creole black woman constantly wearing a headscarf was frowned upon. Sheila told me her mother used to make fun and chastise her for wearing a headwrap because it was seen as the equivalent to wearing a “tignon”. There was a law in Louisiana in 1786, that forced all creole women to wear head wraps. This law was put in place as a way to separate creoles from whites by reinforcing the dominance of the African bloodline over the European. The Tignon decree was also used to deter Creole womans’ beauty and prevent them from overshadowing white women and enticing white men. “*The law intended also to make them appear less attractive to their white suitors by covering their hair, which was widely accepted as a symbol of beauty for this society of women*” (Cole-Leonard 2005). As a result, when a creole woman wears it in present day it is seen as agreeing with the past oppressors and attempting to hide one’s beauty.

- We had to end the conversation early because Sheila was only able to meet for thirty minutes. We were supposed to meet the next week after class however, she was unable, so we decided to continue the conversation via phone.

- Reminding her a bit about the subject, I asked Sheila if she felt that healing came from within? She said yes that she believed healing is all a mental process and if one believes they can heal they can. Sheila believed that modern biomedicine was not always effective, *“you see how I told you the pills were not working for my back, but the herbs are”*. She then told me that much of her healing comes from her reading of the book, “Sacred Woman” by Queen Afua. I was intrigued at this information and asked her how she found the book? She first discovered it because she was researching alternative healing techniques and came to discover Queen Afua's son, Supa Nova Slom's, book named “The Remedy”. This book informs on how to clean one's system through eating raw food. Sheila eventually discovered Queen Afua through a link on her son's website. I informed her that I have heard of other people reading the Sacred Woman book. She told me that she was only on the first gateway (gateway zero) which was, opening the sacred womb. I informed Sheila that I know that much of her journey is personal but if she could tell me anything about it, I would be grateful. She informed me that one major part of opening gateway zero was to taking spiritual baths. Sheila described how every time she bathes there is a personal goal she wants to achieve. *“While the water is running, set your intention of what's gonna happen in the bath, when you let the water run out, release what no longer serves you”*. Because she seemed a bit more open about what happened during the sacred bath then Sannyazin, I proceeded to ask if there was anything

special about the setting or water of the bath? Sheila explained that she set up candles all around the bathtub, turned off the lights and poured frankincense in the bath water. The use of frankincense was mostly due to her like of the smell. I inquired as to how long each bath was, she told me that each bath was typically about 20-30 minutes. During this time, she tells her boyfriend not to enter the bathroom. I asked if besides bathing if she does anything else? Sheila informed me that before each bath she walks around her house burning sage and praying to Saint Michael. Saint Michael is patron saint or archangel of protection in battle and it is the Saint her family identifies with.

- I informed her that it seems that she has changed a lot about her dress, and actions since learning about Kemet and proceeded to ask whether she would ever change her name to a more Egyptian/Kemetite name? She told me that she would not, mainly because it would be an insult to her mother. Sheila's mother chose each of her children's names with a specific purpose. She did not inform me of the purpose. Sheila said, *"people take themselves too seriously"*, in saying this she explained how she felt changing of the names was too much and not necessary to living a certain (Kemetite) lifestyle.
- I decided to ask Sheila about her concept of gods/goddesses and if she attributed any of these traits to herself? She told me that she does not feel that she is a goddess yet, *"I'm not there yet, maybe when I'm 40"*, Sheila is in her 20s. In Sheila's interpretation, King and Queen are words that African Americans use when referring to each other as a way of demonstrating how to

treat one another and use of the words god/goddesses when referring to yourself and others, indicates one's level of spirituality. She then asked me if I knew of a talk show host named "Charlemagne the god", I told her I did.

Sheila explained that she originally felt that it was extremely arrogant of the host to name himself as a god but she eventually came to understand, "*we are made in his(god's) image, so we are also gods*". Sheila also mentioned that in Nation of Islam the practitioners refer to each other as gods/goddesses.

- We ended the conversation with me asking two questions. The first was if she had any daily sayings or mantras she goes by? To which she said she didn't. Secondly, I asked if she had any book recommendations or books she frequently reads? She told me about a book called "Heal Thyself" by Queen Afua.

## **VI. Additional Ethnographic Research**

In addition to my field research, I felt that it would be greatly beneficial to the understanding of Kemetic mindsets surrounding culture, healing, and divinity, if I added some additional ethnographic evidence. This evidence consists of non-scholarly books, and online sources. The online sources include three social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This section will mainly contain quotes and sayings given by the people of the Kemetic community.

**"Sacred Woman" by Queen Afua (2001)**

“Sacred Woman” is written by Queen Afua, it is a book of fourteen chapters. Queen Afua is a Kemetic practitioner, and herbalist with a focus on holistic health. She has written a variety of books surrounding alternative medicine, and healthy eating practices, as well as, created health minded programs. The book is split into three parts. The first part discusses Kemetic philosophy. The focus of the second part is gateway zero, the sacred womb, and how to open and ultimately heal the womb. The womb is mentioned throughout the book. The last part demonstrates how to open the remaining nine gateways. At the very end of the book are recommendations on products and tools to buy that aid in the Sacred Woman’s journey, as well as, *“biographies on sacred woman ancestors, elders, and contemporaries”* (Afua, 2000, pg.385). Afua’s book is an instruction manual for women who want to become a ‘sacred woman’ and go through the initiation process. Throughout the book, Kemet is the main source of instruction with much philosophy and cosmology derived from it. One must go through gateway zero before going through the other nine gateways, because gateway zero “... is the foundational training that has prepared you to enter the high spiritual initiation of the nine gateways of the sacred woman” (Afua, 2001, pg. 123). In order to open each of the gateways, Queen Afua recommends women follow the instructions listed in her book, rely on their inner spirituality, form a connection with ancestors, and use ancient Kemetics as spiritual guides.

“Sacred Woman” very rich in content. It consists of

- Ritual instruction

- *“Chant this hesi in the first language, Mtu NTR four times – I am a sacred woman (Nuk Pu Ntrt Hmt)”* (Afua, 2000, pg. 29)
- *“... prepare for your fire breaths by slowly inhaling four times and exhaling four times”* (Afua, 2000, pg. 261)
- Altar instruction
  - *“Your altar should be placed in a room undisturbed by the public”* (Afua, 2000, pg. 24)
  - The instructions for the creation of the altar are very specific. Queen Afua lists the objects the altar should have on and above it. Each gateway has a specific altar items associated with it. However, regardless of the gateway, each altar should have five pictures of a spiritual guardian, ancestor, sacred self, elder, and contemporary. A person can choose whomever they want to place in each category. However, there are recommendations Queen Afua gives on whose pictures to have for an ancestor, elder, and contemporary. Underneath the pictures there are number of objects. For example, on the gateway 5 altar - sacred space, one must put a baptism bowl which corresponds to water, a feather representing air, white carnations representing earth, an ankh symbol representing spirit, a purple candle representing fire, lavender anointing oil, an indigo sapphire stone, and food such as, corn,

rice, fruits, or vegetables. The food on the altar is supposed to be *“food for your ancestors”*. (Afua, 2000, pg.247). Also, on the side of the altar one is supposed to place a small cinnamon broom however, the reason for the broom and/or its placement is unclear.

- Queen Afua also gives instructions on how to purify one’s altar. *“Wash each altar object in a bowl of purified water mixed with a few drops of frankincense and myrrh and a pinch of sea salt.”* (Afua, 2000, pg.26)
- Prayers
  - Gateway 3 - Sacred Movement, prayer Bes
    - *“Inspiring and enlivening Bes, Guardian of Sacred Movement, fill me with your joyous spirit. May I feel your divine presence in every part of my Body temple, and coursing through my veins as I dance my gratitude for your sacred movement that renews my life force.”* (Afua, 2000, pg. 185)
- Medical Information
  - *“Research has also shown that African American women are more likely than white women to have a hysterectomy, are hospitalized longer, and are at a higher risk for complications and death”*. (Afua, 2000, pg. 1)
- Testimonies’
  - *“The voice of my womb. My womb talks. I’ve had visions. That’s why I know this fibroid tumor in me is going away. I’ve had visions of my*

*cave being closed off by a temporary boulder. But my womb says, no no no no no,. And that's it. As we say in our affirmations: My womb is healing and so is my life!"* (Afua, 2000, pg. 54)

- Affirmations
  - “...remember to keep transforming words, I can't into I can, I won't into I will, I'm unable into I am able, and watch your life transform before your eyes” (Afua, 2000, pg. 132)

### **Sacred Woman Curriculum Manual (2016)**

In addition to the book, Queen Afua developed a curriculum manual that gives an overview of the initiation process. However, this manual is a bit different than the book as it has 12 gateways. The first 10, numbers 0-9 are the same. However, gateways 10 and 11 are added, with gateway 10 being the sacred time and gateway 11 being sacred work. I am unsure of the purpose of these additions.

#### **Gateways**

- 0 - Sacred Womb - represented by Nut (Ancient Egyptian goddess of the Sky, often depicted as giving birth to other deities and the sun)
  - This gateway compares a woman's mental, physical, and environmental state to her womb state.
  - Anatomy that this gateway represents is = uterus
  - Goal = heal womb

- 1 - Sacred Word - represented by Tehuti (Also known as Thoth, Ancient Egyptian god of knowledge, intellect, writing, reckoning)
  - Demonstrates that words having healing and spiritual power
  - Anatomy = throat/lungs
  - Goal = use healing words or activate, *"the medicine in our words"* (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
- 2 -Sacred Foods - represented by Ta- urt (Ancient Egyptian goddess of fertility, childbirth, and protection)
  - Recommends eating natural food and using, *"food as medicine"* (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
  - Anatomy = digestive system
  - Goal = heal body and mind through healthy eating practices
- 3 -Sacred Movement - represented by Bes (Ancient Egyptian dwarf god associated with many things including war and fertility)
  - Using body movement to *"creatively release harmful patterns"* (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
  - Anatomy = circulatory system
  - Goal = perform yoga and other movements to heal
- 4 - Sacred Beauty - represented by HetHru (Ancient Egyptian celestial cow goddess, associated with many things such as, beauty, love, fertility, women, and motherhood)

- This gateway is about improving inner beauty through natural and organic means, embracing natural aesthetics and, "*become a sacred living breathing after, as you adorn yourself in cosmic dress and etiquette for divinity* " (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
- Anatomy = young heart
- Goal = embrace beauty
- 5 - Sacred Space - represented by Nebt- Het (Ancient Egyptian goddess associated with the dead and shadows)
  - This gateway is about allowing spirituality in one's house through the performance of various rituals
  - Anatomy = sub consciousness/consciousness
  - Goal = cleanse home of any bad spirits
- 6 - Sacred Healing- represented by Sekhmet (Ancient Egyptian warrior goddess and goddess of healing)
  - Discusses how to become a healer using alternative medicine, and how to extend this healing to family
  - Anatomy = Blood
  - Goal = heal self and family
- 7 - Sacred Relationships - represented by Ma'at (Ancient Egyptian goddess of truth, morality, and justice)
  - This gateway discusses how to have good relationships
  - Anatomy - Heart/Mature Woman

- Goal = to develop relationships built off of ancient principles that, *“heal and energize our relationships to promote more loving and supporting unions”* (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
- 8 - Sacred Union - represented by Ast - (Ancient Egyptian major goddess of magic and life)
  - Discusses how to have good spousal relationships
  - Anatomy - Heart/Mature Woman
  - Goal = have best relationship with *“divine mate”*
- 9 - The Divine Lotus - Ast & Nefer Atum ( Ast = Ancient Egyptian major goddess of magic and life. Nefer Atum = Ancient Egyptian god associated with the lotus flower)
  - This gateway discusses how to become a Sacred Woman and go into a higher plane
  - Anatomy = Crown
  - Goal = become a *“divine sacred woman”* (Afua, 2016, pg. 7)
- 10 - Sacred Time - Seshat (Ancient Egyptian goddess of writing)
  - This gateway discusses how to use time wisely and productively
  - Anatomy = Skeletal / Muscular / Joints
  - Goal = use the time through the day to *“strengthen your life walk”* (Afua, 2016, pg.7)
- 11 - Sacred Work - Meskhenet (Ancient Egyptian goddess of childbirth)
  - This gateway tells one how to reach their purpose

- Anatomy = Vision Womb
  - Goal = *“Learn how to overcome the birthing blues that block your purpose”* (Afua,2016, pg. 7)
- 
- To open each gateway, one must perform a series of rituals. For example,
    - *“OPEN THE GATEWAY PRE-STEP 1: • Take A 15-30 Minute Dead Sea Salt Bath • Dry And Wrap In Sacred Colors • Go To Prayer Space PRE-STEP 2: • Boil 3 cups of H2O the night before, pour over master herbal or women’s life formula, turn off the flame then steep overnight • Strain tea in the morning and add to drinking bowl for ceremony Step 1: • Mist Space for Purification: Spray Gateway Aromatherapy mist around self & sacred space as you visualize the healing color of the Gateway Step 2: • Pour Gateway Tonic for Rejuvenation: Prepare Gateway Herbal Tonic. Place tea bag into bowl. Pour warm hot water over tea bag; then steep. Step 3: • Light Gateway Aromatherapy Candle: Then light aromatherapy candle as you ignite your inner light Step 4: • Step 4A Gateway Beads: Wrap beads around fire fingers, hold both hands in prayer pose. • Step 4B Gateway Spirit Card: Recite Sacred Woman Spirit Prayer on reverse side of card and the “I AM” series Step 5: • Gateway Stone: Perform 100 fire breaths. Place your*

*Gateway Stone in right hand and rest your hand by your solar plexus as you inhale & exhale deeply Step 6: • Gateway Tonic: Drink warm Gateway Tea to detox your body temple Step 7: • Gateway Healing Prayer: Recite your Gateway Prayer below. Then conclude your Sacred Woman Healing Ceremony with 3-5 minute silent meditation"*

(Afua, 2016, pg. 13)

### **Social Media Platforms**

- Kemet's Historical Displacement
  - *"Whenever oppressors don't have a glorious history of their own they always steal the glorious history of the oppressed"* (Jones, 2019)
  - *"Do you know the 'Amen' after prayers came from #Kemet / #Kush #Nubia also known as #Egypt? All organised religion leads back to original African spirituality before the #Bible."* (Brain Fooood, 2019)
- Popular Culture
  - Michael Jackson's music video of his song, "Remember the Time", was set in ancient Egypt. In the video, Jackson plays entertainment to the pharaoh and his wife, both of whom were dark skinned, along with everyone else in the pyramid being dark skinned as well. Although the song was mainly seen as a love song, it has also been described by many Kemetics as Michael Jackson paying homage to Kemet and telling African Americans to remember times of when they were powerful.

- *"While it is true that Michael Jackson struggled with his Europoid Supremacist mental illness (like most Blacks), he often made great strides to battle against it both within himself and for society. To this day, he has made the greatest effort of any Black person to publicly promote a Black African Kemetic reality. Despite the countless number of Black millionaires with power, no one has dared to remotely come close to promoting a Black Kemetic legacy like the King of Pop did in his 1991 short-film epic music video "Remember the Time." (Kushite-Kemetic Spiritual Science, 2016)*
- Yoga references
  - *"The art of Meditation is a Yoga discipline which was practiced in Ancient #Egypt for the purpose of promoting #spiritual #enlightenment." (DTR 360 Books, 2020)*
  - *"I feel the need to share this yoga experience with the community - especially the children. Yoga has a deep history in North Africa. It's where #KemeticYoga was born. I want to show African people that the idea of yoga isn't a foreign one..." (Khabo Yoga, 2018)*
- Healing
  - *"The Kidneys, the arm, the leg, are all connected to one body. You can't cure the kidneys without curing the nasal drip or the ulcer. It's all interconnected and interrelated. The only difference with the nails and*

*the hair is they are in oxygen all day long. The organs need oxygen too. As a matter of fact every disease is based on oxygen deficiency or lack of oxygen. Let's figure out how we can get healing oxygen flowing through your body and to your self-healing kidney.” (Doctor Sebi, 2016)*

- *“#yogamassage #yogastretch #yogastretching #kemetichealing #massagetherapy #bodywork #bodyworkology is rooted in energy #psychology by applying the ancient theology and has succesfully treated pains, anxiety disorders, aches, fatigue, stress, restlessness, insomnia, depression, hostility, aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, addictions, limited range of movemebr, phobias, eating disorder, OCD, panic, attention deficit disorder, hypertension and social anxiety” (Bourgeoise wellness spa, 2020)*
- *“Ancestors saw the connection with our chakras and our emotions, the planets, the Neteru and more. Learn more about chakras from a Kemetic perspective ... ” (Rasekhi\_arts\_temple, 2018)*
- Self – Deification
  - *“We all came into the world to grow into our divinity. #MetuNeter” (Uwacu, 2020)*

## **VII. Analysis**

### **Kemetic culture**

From my research I have discovered many aspects of Kemet culture. One aspect is the use of colorful clothing and adornments that are supposed to represent Kemetic tradition. The use of color and adornments are not unlike modern day African cultures as well. Other aspects include the emphasis on spirituality, ancestral connection, and sacredness. The use of alternative medicines is also prevalent. Kemetics may use terms such as god/goddess and apply them to everyday people. Additionally, the wearing of 'natural hair', i.e. non chemically processed nor synthetic, is also important in being a part of Kemetic culture. Natural hair wearing represents an ancestral and spiritual connection as well as an embracement of Africanness and self. Lastly, Kemetics may also change their name to match their newfound identity. Overall, they all derive ideology from Kemet in some way.

### **Rituals**

Kemetics employ a wide range of rituals that are performed on a daily or weekly basis. These rituals include many aspects; one of the most common, is mediation. This mediation is particularly important to people who adhere to the rules set in the Sacred Woman's manual/book. A Kemetic may implore any type of mediation they desire; participation is a very personal choice. Meditation can be done by sitting down quietly, with music of any genre, through yoga, breathing or in front of an altar. Especially, with regards to my field research. In, "Sacred Woman", Queen Afua gives her followers specific instructions on how and when to meditate. However, it does not seem that the individuals follow her instructions exactly. The Kemetic healing process involves the use of the mind, in fact the mind must be strong enough

to influence actions which influence healing. With the use of meditation, one is training the mind to focus on the specific task of healing. Victor Turner theorizes that meditation is a way to derive meaning and value from messages transmitted from the unseen world, through various media such as, prophecy visions, apparitions, miracles, divination, and other extraordinary processes and phenomena. From a religious standpoint the meaning of the visible social life can be determined by its relation to the unseen world as well. Meditation has also been perceived to have derived from the implorment of techniques in which mediation is a common practice, such as the performance of yoga, in which traditionally the participant mediates. Specifically meditation is demonstrated as a part of the traditional Indian Yoga process. Which leads to another ritual that Kemetic participate in, Kemetic yoga.

Kemetic yoga is believed to have historical significance, with the Egyptian hieroglyphics being representative of yoga poses. As demonstrated in much research, yoga requires the use of both physical and mental processes. All of my informants practice yoga, actually it seems to be one of the first practices they implore on their Kemetic healing journey, presumably due to the use of the mind and body which corresponds to the intertwinement of the mind and body in Kemetic culture. The use of yoga as a healing and enlightening practice also occurs in yoga practiced traditionally in India. While the western version of yoga may be seen a form of exercise or a source of improving flexibility. Traditional Indian yoga theories, such as Patanjali's sutras of yoga, demonstrate yoga in stages. In her book, *Positioning Yoga*, anthropologist Sarah Strauss shows how the use of Indian style yoga corresponds to

life transitions, going from , *“the practice of morality in social life ... proceeding to physical practices ...and then to different states of mental attention or consciousness”* (Strauss, 2004, pg. 2)

Kemetics also implore certain organic techniques that are beneficial in their healing process, such as eating raw or healthy foods, using herbs, and/or other holistic medicines. The holistic medicines used are wide ranging and used more frequently than modern biomedicine. Another Kemetetic ritual is the use of affirmations. Positive affirmations are very important in the healing process as well, they attempt to encourage the practitioner on their healing journey. Daily affirmations can be personally derived from life experiences or from a specific Kemetetic instruction book.

Kemetetic culture participants may also partake in other rituals such as, air cleansing including smudging, sage burning. Smudging or sage burning is practiced in a wide variety of religions worldwide. Specially for my practioners, it also plays a role in their connection with their organized religion. For example, Sannyazin uses Wudu, which is traditionally practiced in Islam, and Sheila burns sage while praying to Saint Michael. My informants use of these rituals combines their two religious’ practices, as Kemetics are encouraged to perform air cleansing as well. It also demonstrates the significance of air cleansing as performance needed before doing anything involving spirituality.

Another ritual performed by Kemetics is the creation of an altar in which one meditates in front of and/or prays to an ancient Egyptian deity. However, prayer to ancestors or ancient Egyptian god/goddesses was not seen as a practice used by any of

my informants, in contrast to what was demonstrated in my additional ethnographic research. I presume this lack in my informants was due to their integration of Abrahamic religions (Catholicism, Islam), or lack thereof. Altars may typically be known as places where sacrifices are made, or as a medium between the individual and the divine, ultimately as a way to honor the divine. In the Kemetic sense they are placing the objects on the altar as a way to convene with perceived ancestors and for some, ancient Egyptian gods/goddess. When you show reverence to these ancient individuals it is believed that this aids in one's achievement of goals, i.e. healing, balance, enlightenment. Altars have also been traditionally used in many religions ranging from organized religions to unorganized such as wicca, another modern western movement, which practices forms of paganism or witchcraft, also known as alternative spiritualism.

Two very important aspects of Kemetic rituals are the taking of sacred baths and for women, engaging in womb care. Both of these rituals have symbolic importance. Bathing is often thought of a way to achieve hygienic cleanliness however, to Kemetics bathing is much more. The sacred bath represents a purification, a literal cleansing to represent a figurative cleansing. By cleansing the mind of ailments, one moves on to another stage of enlightenment. The use of physical bathing in Kemetic rituals gives the idea that the body is used as a medium between one's goal and their mind. The intertwining of the mind and body are also seen in this ritual. Not solely in the sense of working together but as representative of one another.

Bathing also corresponds to ritual in that it is a transition from one state to another.

Not just from a dirty to clean physical state but other stages of life as well.

The use of bathing to attain purification has also been seen in other religions, such as in Christianity with the use of water in baptisms or as demonstrated by Mary Douglas, specifically amongst the Brahmin, a priestly class in Hinduism, in which a bathing rite must be performed before convening with any spirits. “*The highest state is only gained by a rite of bathing*” (Douglas, 2010). The use of water marks the transition to more a spiritual stage.

Another Kemetic ritual is womb healing. To Kemetics, the womb is a direct representation of life. In fact, the Ankh symbol, an ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol used by many Kemetics, is a direct representative of life. The Ankh symbol can best be described as a cross with an oval loop on top. For some Kemetics, the oval loop represents the womb corresponding to the woman and the cross corresponds to the man, demonstrating the connection of the two genders. As the majority of my research surrounds Kemetic practices of women, it is conceivable that the womb would be of importance, as it is a main component of what separates women from men. The womb is capable of creating life, by taking a small number of cells and turning it into a human being. Therefore, the womb can represent a person’s life force, or source of creating a new, beautiful life which is ultimately what Kemetics are trying to achieve.

Performing these rituals is paramount to a person within Kemetic culture and in their healing. However, the degree to which participates in a ritual varies greatly; if

one is within a Kemetic organization or follows the guidance of the Sacred Woman then one might implore all these rituals. Without the performance of some or all of these rituals, I don't believe that the desired results of healing, spiritual connection and/or identity connection can be achieved. Anthropologist, Victor Turner, postulates that rituals mark transition stages, sort of like rites of passage. Ritual allows for the collective organization of the Kemetic movement. Specifically, it also explains why the Sacred Woman is an especially important book amongst Kemetic women as it gives individual's a formal set of instructions which allows them to bring about their goals in reality. By performing these rituals, the Kemetic transitions further into stages of healing.

### **Self-Healing**

Another theme I have found from my research, is the idea of healing from within or self-healing. As mentioned earlier, performing rituals on a constant basis is paramount to healing within Kemetic culture. One aspect of self- healing includes having some kind of connection to one's ancestors, specifically Kemetic ancestors. This seems to be achievable by a variety of means including the rituals above but, ultimately Kemetics believe that each POC has connection to Kemetic ancestors subconsciously, and this access just needs to be tapped into. Having a connection with distant ancestors from Kemet allows the modern day Kemetic practioners, insight into ancient healing practices, mostly which include ways to self-heal. How one gains access is highly individual. In addition to connection to one's ancestors, Kemetics must connect with their inner spirit. The way to connect to your inner spirit has been

vaguely described but seems to do with the idea of believing in one's own power and innate ability to heal. Another aspect of Kemetic self-healing is educating oneself on Kemetic history, philosophies, and cosmology. By doing this the Kemetic can use presumed ancient techniques to tap into the 'ancient' art of self-healing or what the Kemetics today believed their ancestors did.

Kemetics may also self-heal through the opening of a gateway. Not all Kemetics use the Sacred Woman as a guide, presumably not men however, the idea by most is that one must restore balance to heal. The goal is to restore the balance between the mental, physical, and spiritual. The Sacred Woman Circle attempts to do this by opening each gateway, which represents each part of the body and allows for wholeness and energy to flow. The use of proper breathing techniques through meditation and/or yoga is also important to balance restoration. Another aspect of Kemetic self-healing is to believe in one's inherent godlikeness or divinity. By self-deifying the limitations of not being able to heal oneself are gone. Many Kemetics believe that whatever god they worship can heal and because humans are made in his/her likeness then humans can heal too. This divinity also allows humans to take control of their lifestyle and destiny. Self-deifying also explains why Kemetics implore multiple techniques to aid in the healing process such as, the addition of modern-day organized religions. However, it also seems that many Kemetics believe that the use of so-called 'western religions' is wrong and once one becomes more enlightened, they may forgo the western religion(s) and go towards either Kemetic orthodoxy or broad (non-deity) Kemetic spirituality. Self-deifying differs from having

high self-esteem in that self-esteem doesn't involve a spiritual aspect and the perception of what can be done is limited. Self-esteem means that a person has to have confidence in their abilities however self-deifying implies that confidence is not needed because one's abilities are inherent. Self-deification allows the participant to be a part of processes considered supernatural. One ability that seems supernatural to Kemetics is the total achievement of healing and balance in one's life.

### **Euro vs Afro**

A huge aspect of Kemetic culture I have observed is the rejection of Europe, whiteness and/or westernization, which can also be viewed as a part of the healing process. The main purpose of anti-Europeanness is to reclaim power. Kemetics believe that people of African descent, residing outside or inside of Africa, have lost their power due to the colonization and/or enslavement by Europeans. Kemetics believe European ideals have permeated the 'black mind' and caused them to lose sight of their ability to be powerful. To Kemetics stepping outside of westernization and Europeanness and looking anteriorly to Kemet, helps blacks worldwide reclaim power, over their minds, bodies, fates, history, and culture. Another goal of Kemetics is to combat racism towards blacks. By aligning themselves with a powerful ancient civilization that they believe was permeated by dark skinned peoples, and had a large influence over European history, combats some ideas that people of African descent made very little contribution to modern day civilization. Although, within academia the majority of racist ideas were only prevalent in the 19th and early 20th century, such as unilineal evolution, biological determinism, or eugenics. The non-academic

public of today may still hold true to these ideologies, as demonstrated in the few changes in history textbooks taught to grades k-12. *“The history books that most Americans study, that is, when we study history, is from text written in the late 50s and early 60s. Therefore, many contributions made by Africans or African Americans are not known”* (McMiller, 2008, pg. 51). The Kemetic goal is to also get rid of the idea that blacks are less intelligent, and that Europeans are the most advanced group of people. Kemetics want to show that each civilization had a period in which they were the dominant power in the world. They believe European domination is current while African domination was in the past.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Participants of Kemetic culture in Houston display a vast ideological network that informs their everyday decisions and lives especially with regards to their health needs. From my research, Kemetics employ a variety of healing techniques that are meant to heal mentally, physically, and spiritually. Much of what this culture displays is a large tendency towards religious pluralism specifically, polyontologism or the use of different belief systems. *“In its clearest form polyontologism is an emic stance (an attitude recognized by cultural insiders) of religious plurality that acknowledges the mystical potency (the ontological reality) of more than one set of religious or cosmological forces; marks these religious forces as distinct... and considers all of the ontologies in question eligible to be propitiated or embraced by the same person”* (McIntosh, 2009, pg. 180). Typically, this is a use of both of African traditional

religion (Kemet) and Abrahamic religions. I believe this polyontologism has a lot to do with the unique position of people of African descent. The majority of people of African descent worldwide have experienced some sort of European influence. Amongst the people of Africa and Australian aborigines, this influence is a result of colonization. Amongst the people of African descent in the Americas and Europe, this European influence came from displacement and slavery. As a result of the mixing between African and European culture, remnants of both cultures can be found in individual or community religious practices. For displaced people of African descent today, this polyontologism may be even more prevalent. The people of colonized African countries did not lose the knowledge of their traditional culture and religion, albeit with much of having been suppressed by the European colonists. However, displaced peoples of African descent retain parts of their lifestyle before removal, but the original culture was lost, modified, and often unknown. As a result, the current culture of displaced people of African descent are fragments of different cultures, the origins of which are often unrecognized. Although, there have been attempts within academia to discover the interconnected origins of people of African descent, it is difficult for the average person to differentiate between which parts derived from traditional African culture, European culture, or a mixture of both. Therefore, many Kemetics incorporate the religion of the culture in which they reside with the religion of the culture they believed pertained to them from the past. It seems that Kemetics who practice polyontologism don't feel they are participating in two different religions nor that the values of each religion may be in opposition but rather, they complement

each other. “... *these contradictions are not erased or minimized because practitioners are not expected to be consistent in their beliefs of committed to a single tradition of practice*” (McIntosh, 2009, pg. 189. The use of the two religious systems serve different purposes, the more organized religious system serving the desire for a structured religion and the non-organized religion as a way for unstructured spiritual development. The non-organized religion (Kemet) is more variable in its content, allows for customization, and lets the participant gain the religious elements they feel are missing in the organized religion. As mentioned, the majority of the people who practice Kemetic culture are of African descent residing in the Americas and Europe. However, the largest practitioners are African Americans, from the U.S. Therefore, much of this culture’s practices demonstrate a large degree of Americanness.

Although many Kemetics express a desire to separate from western ideals, mindsets, and traditions, the advent of Kemetic culture as a religious and health practice has many origins in America. This American origin is not just a result of the location in which it was started but because of the ideals of the country that may have caused the culture to form. First, one of the reasons for the advent of Afrocentric thought and use of pan-Africanism, both of which contributed much to Kemetic culture, is because many black scholars have lumped all peoples of African descent together. The reason for this lumping is most likely due to the race-based system of the U.S, which. has always separated people by color or descent. As a result, regardless of the place in the world one originated from, once they arrived in America, they were placed into categories such as, black, white, or native American. Due to this

grouping together, many people face similar experiences and thus started to conceive of their identities in the group they were placed into. Therefore, many people of African descent implore this same technique worldwide. This is demonstrated in the collective consciousness that the Afrocentric paradigm theorizes and the idea that all POC can be healed through the same ancestral means. The desire to describe large groups of people who presumably have different cultures as subscribing to one overarching ideology or universal, is similarly done in many western studies.

Another aspect of Americanness is Kemetics focus on Egypt as a powerful civilization to be revered. In America, Egypt is the only African country frequently spoken about in a historically relevant and powerful way. This is not to say, that there have not been acknowledgements of the contributions of other African civilizations in contemporary African studies however, the mentioning of ancient Egypt largely overshadows other ancient African cultures. This is demonstrated in popular culture, media, grade school history books, and especially in the bible, in which Egypt is mentioned throughout. Therefore, because of the United States large acknowledgement of Egypt, African Americans may also hold a veneration for the country. This ignoring of other non-Egyptian ancient African civilizations might also have to do with the American focus on European history. Although other ancient African civilizations might have had large impacts, ancient Egypt is the African civilization that was most noted as having an impact on European and/or Christian culture. Kemetics might only focus on Egypt, as a way to combat the racism of European Americans and to prove their relevance.

A third American aspect of Kemetic culture is the idea that one's African heritage is the defining part of an individual, despite the large amounts of racial mixing that has occurred since the colonization of America. Many POC may ignore other aspects of their heritage and focus on the African or Kemetic part as their sole ancestry. The last American aspect of Kemetic culture is the characteristics of individualism and freedom. Although Kemetics and Afrocentric scholars claim people of African descent worldwide place a large emphasis on collectivism instead of individualism, Kemetic culture is largely individualistic. From my research, much of the healing achievements gained from self-deification must be done through individuals' means. Although one may guide another, the healing and religious goals must be achieved by the individual. This individuality is something that is largely American and is not in line with many traditional African religions such as the Dogon, Yoruba, or Nuer, all of which demonstrate a large degree of outwardness and community orientation. Also, the degree to which one chooses to participate in Kemetic culture is largely individual, which can be attributed to the United States emphasis on freedom. These claims are not intended to disprove the validity or the historical accuracy of Kemet but rather, to demonstrate the large American influence on the culture.

The variety of healing techniques used by Kemetics are intended to cure a multitude of problems facing many people of African descent. It attempts to heal the mental, physical, and spiritual ailments in one culture. The goals of the Kemetic culture movement are to combat a variety of health problems in a culturally relevant

way. African American life is not a monolith but a tapestried reality, in which geography, religion, ethnicity, gender, income, occupation, and other factors spark varieties in African American life. (Townes, 2001). However, many African Americans in the United States face a number of health and social issues. Including, high rates of poverty, incarceration, hypertension, cancer, and/or trauma. One specific type of trauma relevant to African Americans is historical trauma, or intergenerational trauma of historically oppressed groups. Suffers of this type of trauma are, *“are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing prolonged grief, loss of spirituality, paranoia, low self-worth, self-hatred, and anger and aggression, as well as elevated risk for domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, substance abuse and dependence, and suicide (Brave Heart, 2011; Danieli, 1998; DeBruyn, Chino, Serna, & Fullerton-Gleason, 2001; Manson, Beals, Klein, & Croy, 2005; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015)”* (Danzon et al., 2016, pg. 351). African American women also many face additional issues, such as high rates of abuse, mental, physical and/or sexual, obesity, mental illness, and uterine problems. In regard to uterine issues, African American women on average more than almost any other ethnic groups have higher instances of infertility, preterm birth, uterine fibroids, fetal/maternal death, sexual transmitted diseases, unintended pregnancies, and cervical cancer. (Committee Opinion No. 649, 2015) However, it is important to note that some of these statistics may not be accurate representations, as the health information obtained mostly comes from public clinics and hospitals, in which African American women visit more on average than private physicians.

In addition to health problems, some African Americans may have a high distrust of doctors and the healthcare system as a whole. This distrust can be a result of historical factors including the many experiments performed on African Americans. *“In one of many surveys conducted by researchers, African Americans feared they would be used as guinea pigs for medical research. This survey also found that blacks were more likely than whites not to trust that their doctors would fully explain the significance of their participation in clinical research or other studies.”* (Kennedy et al., 2007). These known experiments may include, the gynecological experiments performed on African American slave women in the mid-1800s by J. Marion Sims, often known as the father of modern gynecology or the Tuskegee syphilis experiments on young African American males in the mid to late 1900s or even the presumed racist double agenda of the founder of planned parenthood, Margaret Sanger, *“Eugenics without birth control seems to us a house builded [sic] upon the sands. It is at the mercy of the rising stream of the unfit.”* (Sanger, 1919). This distrust of physicians might also have to do with the belief by many African Americans that they are not receiving proper or adequate care from their physicians. This idea can be formed as a result of preconceived notions or personal experiences. In fact, some literature has demonstrated the issues arising between POC and non-POC physicians. *“Some problems can be attributed to intentional insults by health care providers, to include communication or poor quality of care. Also, unintentional insults by the providers may include some form of gestures or comments that may be demeaning; i.e., the actual tone of the voice used when speaking to a client. Some health care providers*

*may have fears or problems relating to African American clients and the client may sense this uneasiness contributing to their distrust.” (Kennedy et al, 2007, pg. 57).*

*“Evidence suggests that factors such as stereotyping and implicit bias on the part of health care providers may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in health”*

(Smedley et al., 2003). Overall, Kemetic culture attempts to tackle these large health issues with its multitude of facets including, emphasis on womb care, meditation therapy, physical activity, historical pride, healthy eating practices, education, spiritual enlightenment, and alternative medical practices. Comprehensively, Kemetism encourages one to be more proactive than reactive in response to health issues.

The Kemetic cultural movement also attempts to get rid of stereotypes. A prevalent stereotype related to women, is the idea of the ‘strong black woman’ in which an African American woman is supposed to be an embodiment of strength and nurture “ *... strength is exhibited by persevering in the midst of obstacles and limited resources (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Woods-Giscombé, 2010), and by covering up one’s shortcomings and stressful experiences (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Black & Peacock, 2011; Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Romero, 2000; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2004). ...caretaking is demonstrated by prioritizing others’ needs and preserving African American families and communities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Woods-Giscombé, 2010)” (Watson and Hunter, 2015). An ideology which is surrounded by strength has much to do with, African American women's unique position, in which they must combat racism, sexism, and classism. Kemetic culture does two things to resist this stereotype. First, it attempts to empower the African*

American male and reinforce equality amongst the sexes, which gives the African American woman an equal role rather than a dominant one in her relationships. It also allows for the acknowledgement of problems unique to women, allows them to express vulnerability, and emphasizes prioritizing their mental and physical health.

Secondly, Kemetic culture attempts to combat the ‘strong black woman’ stereotype by addressing something not widely acknowledged, African American male privilege. African American male privilege is the privilege that African American men have over women in general and in particular African American women. Black male privilege is presumed to be different from general male privilege or white male privilege in that it acknowledges the differences between African American men and women. Some examples of African American male privilege may include, *“I don't have to choose my race over my sex in political matters or I do not have to worry about the daily hassles of having my hair conforming to any standard image of beauty the way black women do or I have the privilege of not having black women, dress up and play funny characters- often overweight- that are supposed to look like me for the entire nation to laugh or even, in the Black Church, the majority of the pastoral leadership is male..”* (Woods, 2008). Kemetic culture brings awareness to this privilege and by doing so combats it, in order to promote equality between the sexes, allow for better male/female relationships and heal family issues. Equality amongst the sexes is very important to this culture, not so much in the way of equal gender roles but for mutual respect and contributions. Kemetics believe that inequality amongst the sexes came from Europeans ideals, whereas in Kemetic culture the sexes

were equal. *“the equality between men and women in Egyptian antiquity was an integral part of the divine order”* (Obenga and Saakana, 1992).

Overall, my research has concluded that Kemetics use a variety of healing techniques and self-deification plays an overarching role. Despite its limitations, the Afrocentric paradigm does a great job of explaining the ideology behind this culture. The paradigm demonstrates how healing through self-deification arises because it postulates that spirituality is a part of human beings and therefore, each has access to divinity. Additionally, the mind, body, and spirit are not seen as separate but rather, one in the same, in which each person has access to each part and can heal all. The Afrocentric paradigm also postulates that one has the ability to regulate and master one’s abilities without outside interference, which allows for one to take control of healing abilities as well. The use of Afrocentric paradigm in further studies might be beneficial and compares to feminist standpoint theory, *“ which claim that the perspectives of subordinated social groups have an epistemic advantage regarding politically contested topics related to their subordination, relative to the perspectives of the groups that dominate them”* (Anderson, 2020). The combination of the Afrocentric paradigms, the American traits of individualism, freedom, racial separateness, and emphasis on Egypt, along with Kemet cultural beliefs about their ancestors use of self-healing and alternative medicines, all explain this culture’s belief in self-deification. The use of a multitude of rituals allow for the practitioner to believe they are achieving their goals and is another example of how rituals are not merely

practices but, *“actually generates the very power its presupposes, ... conjures up the presence of absent potential”* (Comaroff, 2013).

This research once again emphasizes the importance of healing in a culturally relevant way. Kemetetic culture is suited to holistically heal ailments specially faced by displaced peoples of African descent. My project also has implications for exploring other types of alternative medicines that implore a variety of techniques, to include religion, education, and spirituality. The use of self-deification amongst Kemetetic practitioners promotes healing by placing responsibility of health in the hands of individuals through self-efficacy rather than sole reliance on pharmaceuticals. My research has implications for medical practioners, and the idea of what healing means in the medical system. Kemetism is a demonstration of the ineffectiveness of relying solely on Cartesian dualists ideas and demonstrates that for minorities groups a different approach might need to be taken. *“The cultural differences and the inadequacies of many health providers to be culturally competent in regard to dealing with minority populations can be staggering. Many health care providers, unless they are of the same ethnic background, know very little about how to interact with the African American client population. Many times, there is a misunderstanding or both the verbal and non-verbal behavior of this minority group”* (Kennedy et al, 2007). Overall, my research demonstrates how the use of modern biomedicine as most effective amongst westerners should be revisited, as other medical systems may have better results. In the future studies it might be beneficial to explore the men of Kemetetic culture and examine the types of healing techniques and goals they are trying

to achieve. There also might be a study done on comparing the health outcomes of people of African descent who use holistic medical techniques such as, Kemetics versus those who don't.

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