

CHAPTER 10

Healing from the burden of our heritage

'The paradox of trauma is that it has both the power to destroy and the power to transform and resurrect.'

Peter A. Levine (2010, p. 37)

Introduction

The principles of healing offered in this chapter will be of use to both practitioners and general readers.

I have come to the conclusion that, if you have never had the privilege of ownership, your sense of self value changes. The dictionary describes ownership as the state of mind or the fact of being an owner. In the context of healing, this begs the question – owner of what? Of one's rights, of control, of having power over one's life, freedom?

Healing, in the context of this book, is about moving beyond all the hallmarks of oppression and holding on to a hopeful vision that offers movement forward, towards change and individuation. There are two key processes that enable a sense of freedom: transcendence and transformation.

Freedom: a precursor or end-goal of healing?

An observation I have made during the writing of this book is that psychoanalysis seems not to have an entry for 'freedom' in its dictionaries. Counselling and psychology, on the other hand, appear to address it not as a standalone word, but rather to talk about it in terms of, for example, free will, freedom to make choices about one's life, freedom to access one's

emotions, and so on, as people in charge of our own destiny. This would be all well and good if equal opportunities, privileges and liberties, which actualize personal goals for freedom, were offered to all. The reality is that existing and new encumbrances and obstacles are heaped in the paths of marginalized groups.

Interpretations of freedom

At its most basic level, freedom is the power or right to act, speak or think as one wants. It's the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved – it is independence. Freedom is not necessarily synonymous with happiness. In my view, these are two distinct concepts, but interlinked.

At a more layered level, freedom is commonly known as the quality or state of being free from governmental oppression. Political freedom, in this sense, is the absence of interference of an individual by the use of coercion or aggression. What coincides with these two definitions is the notion that liberty and freedom create power and resources to fulfil one's own potential. Determinists argue that all human actions are predetermined and thus freedom is an illusion. This opens up a whole debate on the concept of free will. Plato talked about freedom from tyranny of the soul. He described being free from the dominion of the six tyrants: anger, jealousy, fear, desire, pleasure and pain – not only for the individual, but also for society. Other philosophers (Chakrabarti, 2017; Wenzel and Marchal, 2017) describe freedom as non-attachment to the senses and the physical world, thoughts, feelings and emotions.

What strikes me about the concept of freedom in the world of counselling and psychotherapy is that it is still not very clear what it is, ultimately, for racially marginalized people – and what psychological yardsticks are used to measure this transformative process for them. It feels important to include the concept of freedom as a standalone goal which assesses personal responsibility, free will, personal choice, entitlement to equal opportunity and self-value. Facilitative questions that might help black and brown focus more deeply are:

- What does personal freedom mean to you?
- What would it look like?
- How will it impact your life?
- How will you want to use it for yourself and others?

- What could be the obstacles to your freedom?
- How would you negotiate these obstacles and blocks?
- How can we use this therapy space to work towards achieving it?

Transcendence and transformation

Both transcendence and transformation are means towards psychic healing, but I see them as different and complementary to each other. In the context of healing from the burden of heritage, transcendence is the pursuit of a higher state of being. This may be achieved through a lifetime dedicated to meditation, spiritual practice, faith healing and a whole host of complementary and alternative therapies. A multitude of paths may be chosen and followed to ultimately move beyond the four basic freedoms: freedom of speech; freedom of worship; freedom from want; freedom from fear. However, we immediately come up against unfairness in this human quest, as marginalized groups struggle to lay claim to the basic civil liberties and rights that democratic societies are meant to afford to all citizens equally. At the starting line, minorities are often positioned unfairly, as if paying some penalty about which they know nothing. First place is always occupied by the privileged majority, who get off to a head start. So the vertical challenge of moving beyond 'the burden' and seeking a higher and stiller state of being is always fraught with difficulties and greater challenges.

In psychotherapy, transformation is often seen as a series of corrective experiences facilitated by a skilled therapist, and a breakthrough in the client's effort to engage in new behaviour, adopt healthier ways of relating to others and gain a more positive view of self. As such, corrective experiences play a central role in the transformation process. Yet, as an active process, there seems to be scant attention devoted to the nature of transformation: what it is, how it is achieved, what mechanisms trigger its evolution and the consequences for positive outcome. The existential approach does address transformation, for example van Deurzen (2009), but, in the intercultural context of black generational trauma, there is a paucity of information.

In our current zeitgeist, which I have already described in Chapter 4, black clients seem to be asking and wanting something bigger, deeper changes that lead towards wholeness and more authentic connection

– both within the self and in their external reality. The following composite quote expresses this, along with the impediments that stall individuals in repetitive behaviours and thought patterns, way beyond their sell-by date:

I feel I am doing all the right things ... eating right, sleeping tight, really into meditating, karma cleansing, yogic practice, breath work ... I love my chanting and drumming, do black women's studies, shelves full of black books for enlightenment of the soul ... I am doing all of this stuff, but I don't feel filled up ... why am I holding myself back? ... Why am I still hiding? ... Why do I still feel empty? ... Why can't I trust myself more to believe in me? ... What am I afraid of? ... Am I terrified I might be found out to be a fraud? ... I feel I am frightened of my own shadow ... I end up doing, doing, doing with very little being ...

In order to address this in therapy, a more active transformational process is required, demanding that the therapist embrace the impact of racialized trauma on black life. Steven Frosh (2013) adopts a vertical and horizontal perspective in his analytic examination of hauntings and ghostly transmissions in psychoanalysis. I find this axial compass helpful in thinking about healing in the black context, which I see as stepping proudly and fully into life with all of our identities.

Vertical analysis

In a nutshell (or jam jar, as will be revealed in the poignant example below), a vertical analysis facilitates a top-down focus on the transmission trajectory of the client's generational history, and can create a therapeutic opening to look at latent historical content in the clinical presentation. A vertical analysis enables identification of what is transmitted from one generation to the other, and gets repeated and subsequently internalized. Alongside this, it helps identify the relational and not yet fully understood epigenetic transmissions which hamper the natural propensity towards growth and actualization. The benefit of this approach for the client enables a fuller insight into the generational repetition that they are trying to repair.

A vertical exploration helps to name familiar racialized pain by moving across the client's generational scripts. Identification of these historical patterns allows for straighter lines of narratives to be created and, thus, clearer connections between past and present. Only when clarity of the

generational burden being carried is gained and its resultant personal discomfort identified does the work of negotiating change become urgent. If the discomfort can be tolerated, despite its negative or damaging impact, change is stymied. This phenomenon has led to a familiar refrain that I share with my clients: 'We do not shift until we feel sufficiently uncomfortable with the status quo.' Therefore, if we coast in the midst of the trauma transmissions, transformation will seem out of reach and clients become resigned to how things are for their ethnic and racial group.

Horizontal analysis

A horizontal approach moves across the client's daily life, with its focus very much on the present, dealing with situations that penetrate black people's personal psychic boundaries, thereby impacting their present functioning. The careful therapeutic attendance to these trauma experiences leads to a better understanding of the correlation between situation and psychological impact and the elevation from the pain. Horizontal analysis embraces the current intersectional impact of racialized trauma and creates the right space to deal with consequent hauntings. Working horizontally with the manifest content of the client's day-to-day struggle patterns enables better accounting of their agency, both individually, within the black collective, and how they negotiate the white world.

A horizontal analysis of racialized trauma can become a more potent tool when used in conjunction with the vertical. Combining the tools can initially focus the client on a single incident of racialized trauma; once this manifest content is fully exhausted in therapy through a horizontal analysis, the vertical analysis can facilitate exploration of the latent content for a deeper understanding. A combined approach interrupts the cycle of the dreaded events and subsequent hauntings, eventually lightening the burden that is part of black heritage.

Self-actualization

'The organism has one basic tendency and striving - to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism.'

(Rogers, 1951, p. 487)

A vivid childhood experience came to mind, which beautifully encapsulates the challenge for the process of transformation. Its simplicity is a poignant reminder of what Carl Rogers (1959) honours as the uniqueness of one of nature's most instinctual human drives: self-actualization.

Rogers believed that humans have one core motive in life – to reach self-actualization, which means to fulfil one's potential. For a person to grow, Rogers believed that they need an environment characterized by genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood).

This is the transformation process – without these, personalities will not develop as they should, much as a tree will not grow without sunlight and water.

A child's fortuitous experience

'We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.'

Maya Angelou

As a 10 year old living in the Caribbean, my curiosity led to the accidental hobby of collecting the most unusual and colourful caterpillars I could find near our home in the remote area of Mara, a sugar plantation in Berbice (one of the three counties of Guyana). Caterpillars, butterflies and other exotic insects were plentiful in the rich flora of the lush and unpolluted tropics. With no prompts or directions from adults, I saved up twenty empty jam jars, into which I individually placed a different species of caterpillar, with leaves from the corresponding plants and bushes where I had found them.

Twenty jam jars with their residents were lined up on a long veranda ledge and I delighted in looking after my new pets. Little did I know that I had created the ideal conditions for the wondrous process of transformation. I watched the veritable eating machines grow plumper and longer as they stuffed themselves with the leaves that I fed them daily. After a few weeks, when they seemed to reach a critical size, they stopped eating; I was puzzled and became confused as to what to do. I noticed strange things happening to their skin, as a silky skein formed around their bodies.

Soon they became encapsulated in a dull-looking protective casing and it appeared that nothing was happening. Thinking they were all dead, my naive 10-year-old self became quite impatient. I poked at one caterpillar with a twig, trying to will it into life, only to realize with horror that I had disturbed the magical living process that would promptly kill the larva. I remember walking around in a state of upset and resignation for another week, until my hopes were lifted by the sight of activity taking place inside the remaining nineteen cocoons. The signs of life taught me to be patient and I quickly learnt to just watch, be still and wait for nature to do its thing. Around the twenty-eighth day of this bizarrely exciting and disturbing new learning experience, nineteen one-and-a-half-inch brown capsules metamorphosed into beautiful airborne fairies. Some emerged slowly, lingering on the rim of the jar to sun their wings before flying off. Others simply took their first flying leap into the air and floated off into the wide green tropical surroundings. I was profoundly affected and, fifty-plus years on, still clearly remember this personal character-forming experience.

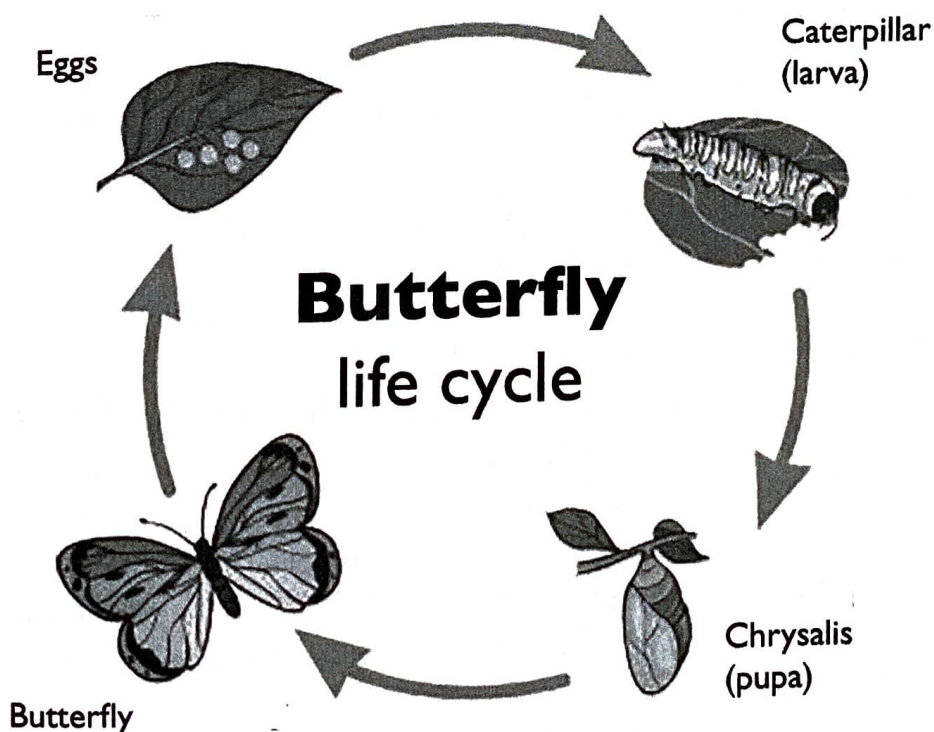


Figure 10.1 The Butterfly life cycle. Source: Getty Images

The child bearing witness to this enchanted experience seems to me a perfect and powerful metaphor for transformation – a slow and

meticulous process of negotiating a rite of passage that involves the shedding of skin (the weight of old burdens attached to the old self) and release from trappings that no longer serve the new existence. This long held magical introjection has become deeply embedded in my psyche, shaping the trajectory of my career and fundamental belief that we all have the (natural) potential to change our circumstances if we work hard to create the conditions for transformation – even when societal blocks threaten and deny the actualization process.

Transformation: an active, moving process

Transformation is about having the right conditions within the self for the creation of our fullest aliveness to be experienced. For those whose generational histories have been perpetually marred by white oppression, this active process requires us to:

- create straighter lines in our trauma narratives, in order to have a more joined-up understanding of their relationship with the past, present and future
- re-white (rewrite) our whitewashed internalized identity scripts, for example, *Whites are more intelligent; I will never fit in. They will always be on top*
- shed archaic and outmoded values and belief systems
- readjust old character traits
- conduct regular mental hygiene checks for stronger ontological security (balance in life)
- let go of the psychological burdens of heritage and leave behind old fears and anxieties that are not fit for present purpose
- turn down the volume of all negative voices of the internal oppressor (Alleyne, 2006), which is the internal enemy – for those voices no longer speak a truth that helps our agency
- separate from habits that keep us stuck in old and familiar comfort zones
- practise reliable self-regulation skills in preparation for new experiences and unknown and unfamiliar challenges
- capitalize on every opportunity to step fully into the power of our hybrid selves.

In my thirty-plus years of clinical practice, I was not always aware of how client difficulties, distress, and 'dis-ease' were influenced by or enmeshed with relational aspects of historical trauma. It was not always clear how the transmissions of the past were interlocked with the black client's material in the present. From my observations of particular patterns emerging over time, however, I soon recognized that the fact of these occurrences in several black clients' lives was not a coincidence. Familiar patterns of behaviour in attempting to manage racialized trauma and the particular ways people became stuck with their psychological blocks, as if investing in the very thing that was not working, could not be accidental. I came to the conclusion that what had ceased to be coincidence in these repetitive observations, was indeed a phenomenon of intergenerational trauma.

The drive to understand these observable occurrences heavily influenced the focus and thrust of all my subsequent academic and research studies. The end results identified relational aspects of the past being very much alive in the present, with the intersectional components of race, ancestry and history intertwined. The phenomenon leaves me to conceptualize transformation through two succinct sayings:

Transformation is the journey you are on. You are exploring the wisdom of your soul. You are shedding old ways and beliefs that no longer fit who you are becoming. Be brave ... you are becoming your authentic self.

And in the specific context generational trauma:

Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about un-becoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place.

The identification of the transformation phenomenon made something real, which I was able to name, anchor and use as a conceptual handle to steady myself in my therapeutic work with black clients. The phenomenon is real and ever present, and it impacts black lives.

Interruptions to the black transformation process behave like a pendulum. The trauma 'alarm' is set in motion when white racism is experienced. The trauma response punctures and permeates the ego (and semiotic) coverings, triggering the pendulum to swing into the wake of

the past, where dormant ancestral trauma sediments become reactivated. As we must live life in the present and not the past, the pendulum is inevitably pushed back into the present, but now it is more heavily burdened by the compound trauma effect. It finally comes to a standstill in the wake of the aftershock and hauntings.

Transformation is a state of being and therefore inextricably linked to our healing process. How we, as black people, understand and manage these trauma effects is crucial to maintaining ontological security. My observations suggest that how effectively we heal from the burden of our heritage is very much dependent on our early childhood experiences and how our transgenerational, intergenerational and immediate family attachment styles and patterns have been formed. The more secure and healthy our early family attachments are, the stronger our ability and capacity for resilience, transformation and healing. The weaker these foundations, the greater the challenges will be for recovery from the reverberations of racialized trauma. It is said that, when we experience a traumatic event, it has a ricocheting effect of opening all other doors where trauma reside. Often we have little control over this intrapsychic activity, and therefore an aspect of transformation and healing is knowing how to manage these ripple effects.

Celebration of black resilience

One way I have chosen to highlight the uniqueness of black resilience is to measure it against the power and ability to recover and remain mentally robust in the midst of the following daunting odds: the type and nature of human trauma; the degree to which the trauma perforates the essence of identity; the size of the group affected (wherever in the world); the time, length and range of the trauma event; and the granular level at which objectification occurs from the outside world. I use the word granular, in this sense, to mean seemingly small and insignificant racialized incidents which have the profound opposite effect of penetrating deeply in harmful ways. This is the anatomy of racial hauntings that is often invisible and therefore hiding in plain sight.

I would argue that those who are accustomed to social privilege and racial dominance (acknowledged or unacknowledged) would find it impossible to tolerate (and survive) the same degree of historical and

ongoing oppression. My own observations bear this out; for example white attendees on my unconscious bias training often comment on how *wiped out, discombobulated* and *disorientated* they feel after a six-hour training session – even set against a genuine will to engage with the subject, one day of engagement is enough. In another example, I observe extreme anxiety and discomfort in a white person after a mere one-hour pre-consultancy discussion about conflict resolution in a racially mixed team. In another similar meeting, a white male director said to me, in banter-style, ‘I need to lie on the ground for a week after this’. Such casual humour speaks loudly of a weight that feels too heavy to hold, and this is before the training has begun.

The more racially privileged may also find their capacity challenged in race conversations, where they become anxious, defensive, apologetic, or dogmatic; many get up and leave the room, because they have had enough. Some choose to leave mentally, shutting down while present. Either way, these actions indicate intolerance and unbearable discomfort aroused by race challenges.

Other indicators of little to zero capacity to contain racial discomfort by dominant others can be seen in the hasty and premature resignation of senior staff when the spotlight is shone on their racial transgressions; these public ‘outings’ shame the intact self, and the slipping of their semiotic cover becomes a terror that must be avoided at all costs. There is also the nimble mechanism of impenetrable powerful ranks being closed to protect the guilty in similar incidents, as in the decades of widely documented well-known cases of institutional racism within Metropolitan Police office culture and practice. A more recent phenomenon can be observed whereby parties guilty of serious race demeanour use the shield of their mental health to plead diminished responsibility and/or loss of mental capacity when faced with punishment for their racial crime. In all of the aforementioned examples, there is a silent terror and inability to stay with and hold responsibility relating to racial discomfort. The avoidance response is to retreat, freeze, close ranks or ‘pull up the drawbridge’ in order to protect the self – and, in some cases, their race.

Peoples of the black diaspora are recognized the world over for their innate ability to be resourceful and resilient, even in the direst of circumstances. We have only to think of parts of war-torn Africa, where conflict-ravaged people manage to eke out a meagre existence after repeated natural and man-made disasters. Many have mastered

the amazing art of being resilient. Although battle-weary by life's circumstances, black people are still able to work well, play well, love well and expect well. Many have moved from the position of mere surviving to thriving. Countless others are aware of the fact that hurt people who hurt others must seek opportunities to move away from the position of victim to that of victor. These may sound like trendy sound bites, but they are celebrated aspects of black life that can sometimes be easily forgotten in discourses and texts focused on trauma.

Guiding principles for healing from generational trauma

The following principles are a practical guide to various audiences for the work of transcending generational trauma. Central to the guide is the knowledge that positive change can arise from the place of trauma:

- **Compassion** Being a regular visitor to the pain of racialized trauma can equip you with a better understanding of the struggles of other racial and cultural minorities. Your increased compassion can enable easier access to others' suffering and pain, particularly in the mental and psychological health professions.
- **Heightened instincts** Heightened instincts can be a useful psychological tool that helps you detect pathological narcissism in others. This is the narcissism that can be found in racial superiority and other circumstances where you become the perceived target or convenient container into which others project their unwanted feelings. Be mindful, however, to learn the art of self-regulation in the use of this psychological tool, so as not to let it take over and push you into states of hypervigilance, hypersensitivity, paranoia and general mistrust of all people.
- **Heightened morals** Some people develop a clarity of what is right and wrong and strongly follow this moral stance. Morals might be compounded by faith and religious beliefs, which serve as guiding principles for life. But be mindful that, in our rapidly changing climate, rigidity in morals can leave you behind others who lead more fluid lives (with less conservatism and cultural orthodoxies, that is, belief and value systems).

- **Resilience** There is general acknowledgment and recognition of black people's abilities to be emotionally resilient and strong in the face of adversity. Many of us have grown up with family stories, folklore and sayings that attest to these strengths.
- **Sublimation** Following on from this, strength from intact emotional abilities can be sublimated into many forms, for example, creative and artistic expression, as acknowledged in previous chapters.
- **Personal boundaries and our relationship with time** It is important to recognize that maintaining boundaries is not entrapment or being anal (rigid). It is also not the case that respecting time boundaries means being 'too white' or following 'the white man's rules'. Creating good and effective boundaries is a marker of self-discipline, self-care and self-respect, as well as respect for other people. This single achievement can be a positive factor in becoming more competent and productive in what we do. Healthy boundaries make life less stressful and cluttered and enable a sense of calm and spaciousness.
- **Belief in oneself** This is about increased self-esteem and self-worth that allows for the pursuit of dreams and hopes, key tenets of transformation. Healing from the burden of heritage, by whatever means, is to individuate and actualize one's fullest potential. Healing that leads to transformation allows for a completely different view of life and the world, where one can achieve a profound sense of strength and personal permission.
- **Recognition of the importance of self-worth and self-care** For those who carry the compound weight of being carers to their families, other people's families, the sick, disabled and needy, and to the masses within the areas of hospitality and the lower echelons of the retail and ancillary industries, the alert is to move the value of self-care and self-compassion to the top of the list. To those in jobs in the care sector, often populated by black women who look after others physically, psychologically, socially, medically and spiritually, the message is crucial. For those who fetch, carry, clean, hold, contain and tend to the needs of needy and privileged others, often without adequate recognition or financial reward, the principle of self-care is urgent. These complex demands take their toll. I suggest

personal mottos relating to 'Care for the Caretaker' be scripted in as the number one priority to protect personal boundaries and preserve self-respect. Although caring is a strength, the overwhelming desire to help others may unwittingly leave us entangled in unhealthy spaces where abuse and enmeshment patterns are re-enacted. Recognize outmoded personal and inherited scripts that have passed their sell-by-date and reframe these defunct ways of conducting one's life.

No one, in my view, speaks more powerfully to boundaries and self-care than Audre Lorde (1988, pp. 64-5), who reminds us: 'Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.' Lorde recognized that freedom was meaningless if she didn't have the courage to deliver it to her own self. 'If we don't care for ourselves and each other, who gets to enjoy the fruits of our labour? Are we again positioning ourselves to be the world's mules? All work and no reward? You are living your ancestors' wildest dream and your oppressors' worst nightmare every time you rest.' (ibid.)

Recognize your personal triggers on meeting the white world

- Differentiate between what is imagined and presumed, and what is real and factual. This will lessen confusion, misjudgement and projection.
- Assess what is your stuff and what belongs to the other. There is less of a tendency to project personal disgruntlements if we own our baggage. This distinction assists cross-cultural interactions and relationships.
- Reflect critically on your attitudinal disposition and default position in mixed interactions. Be aware of tendencies to be hypercritical, hypersensitive and overcautious. These may inadvertently limit your expansion and enjoyment from wider social interactions.
- Be mindful of how hauntings cause obsessive worry and preoccupation long after racially motivated incidents and

- situations have occurred. Notice how you deal with ruminations; how much time you pick over things, spend surfing social media platforms, obsess about others and struggle with shutting off these activities. Such repetitive behaviour only serves to intensify emotional defeat and triggers mental health disturbance.
- Be aware of the downsides to your coping strategies, such as routinely wearing a metaphoric bullet-proof vest that acts as psychological armoury for meeting the menace of racism. These forms of self-protection may give off the wrong message that keep people at arm's length. An example is the adopted mannerism, colloquially referred to as, wearing the 'resting-bitch face' (RBF). Unfortunate misreading of 'RBF' may inadvertently add to the stereotype of black women being aggressive, angry, difficult and a problem. Psychological armours may provide protection, but they also weigh us down.
 - Notice your responses to being made to feel invisible, indifferent or objectified by the absence of recognition or gaze of the dominant other. Do you hold on to a quiet sense of rejection, harbour resentment and shame? Or do you react in the heat of the moment, or simply surrender to the status quo? Remember control is lost when we allow the outside world to dictate how we feel about ourselves. Granted, we are influenced by our surroundings, but acting from a place of autonomy and strength is a key principle to negotiating the work of generational healing.

Recognize your historical trauma triggers

Get to know and differentiate your trauma triggers so as not to become entangled and become a hostage to your past. If archaic pain material leaks too heavily into current difficulties and struggles, it is very likely to contribute to your losing the plot. What this means is that there will be no clear overview or focus and productive energy to engage in the right fight. Some fights are worth it; others steal our energies. It is therefore necessary to uncouple from archaic trauma triggers with therapeutic support that enables healing and closure of untreated trauma. Working through old wounds, where pain continues to be easily triggered, requires work that changes the old wash cycle from churning around

the familiar heavy load in exhaustive and futile ways.

Deal effectively with historical trauma triggers that lead to a new approach to healing. The process offers a clearer overview of what one is entangled in, what needs to be separated and let go of, and what can be reframed and rebuilt. This is needed for better self-regulation, assured ego strengthening and contentment, which has aptly been described as natural spiritual wealth that is not dependent upon the balance in one's checking account. Ego strengthening allows for gratification to be experienced by healthier internalizations that fulfil areas of loss and need. In these corrective modes of operating, movement towards authentic goals can be achieved. Missing or delaying support that can actualize these skills may unwittingly keep a person stuck in the destructive cycle that is the burden of heritage.

The following questionnaires will help you to identify and recognize your trauma triggers and know it is time to engage in appropriate healing work that suits your needs.

As a black person, have you found yourself:

- preoccupied with experiences of racial discrimination to the extent that the disturbance has manifested in recurring or disturbing dreams?
- avoiding the place where the racialized trauma occurred?
- hating all white people and all things white?
- carrying feelings of victimhood because of your racial identity?
- questioning your worth and entitlement in life?
- suffering social anxiety because you don't trust interactions with others different from your racial group?
- feeling paranoid about what people might think of or say to you?
- mistrustful and hopeless for the future?

- becoming overly dependent on one person for all of your support?
- avoiding risk-taking and sticking to what is safe and familiar?

Add your own observations to this list.

As a black person, do you:

- hold yourself back by creating prohibitions (no-go areas in your life, for example, 'this is not for me', 'that wouldn't work', 'I am happy with my lot', 'I don't trust mixing with white people')?
- gauge yourself against what white people feel and think about you?
- daydream or romanticize frequently that, one day, it will all come good for you?
- give up ALL of your agency to a God, because only 'he can make things happen' for you?
- seek to prove to others at all costs that you are somebody?
- judge yourself according to your family, church, cultural group and societal expectations?
- feel happy for other black people's achievements or burned by the light of their success or brilliance?
- doubt or question your abilities and end up feeling a fraud, not worthy, not entitled?
- continually return to the past to explain your present-day struggles and challenges?

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- carry a guilt or burden complex about delighting in your earned successes because you deem it not right, unfair or selfish to celebrate openly when other black people are not as lucky?

Add your own observations to this list.

As a mixed-race/ mixed-heritage person, do you:

- negate any part of your racial heritage because of shame, blame, betrayal, hurt or hate?
- split the parts of your racial identity by idolizing the perceived dominant part and denigrate the other/others?
- secretly wish you were white, so you wouldn't have to deal with the social pressures and difficulties of straddling both black and white worlds?
- feel angry with or envious of other black people because you perceive their experience of racism as being more straightforward and yours complicated, and therefore worse, because you have to deal with both black and white prejudice and negativity?
- struggle with feelings of belonging to a racial home as a direct consequence of your dual (or other) heritage?
- secretly feel ashamed of the minority ethnic parent and align yourself with the parent from the dominant majority ethnic group?

Add your own observations to this list.

Recognize and reframe historical enmeshment scripts

Scripts are usually derived from what we internalize from family scenarios and interactions, and particularly formative experiences and events. They are held internally, like commandments that become guiding principles for life, for example, 'As a black person, I must work twice as hard to ever be noticed and valued.' Scripts act as codes for our conduct, for example, 'Never show vulnerability, as that will be taken as weakness.' Our connection to scripts shapes not only our behaviour but also our personality traits, attachment patterns and attachment styles. There are family scripts and these are represented in every personal script.

Transactional analysis talks about life scripts, which encompass an individual's whole life span, for example, 'I will never leave myself wanting and reliant on anyone', but also many scripts that may be enacted in the moment 'I won't employ that black firm to work for me because they will ultimately let me down.' There are family scripts that span and connect generations, for example, 'Every first-born in my father's lineage developed mental health problems; we may have to take action if our first born is male.' Scripts get passed on and blended into our own lives and continue to overlap through the generations.

Re-white dysfunctional 'me-now' scripts

- Create clear narratives about your trauma, which means joining up the dots and straightening out confused and entangled areas of your life, so that you have a clearer picture of your life history. It is most helpful if you can do this with a non-judgemental witness, such as a counsellor or a psychotherapist.
- Have the boldness of heart to embrace your own unorthodoxy, which means giving yourself permission to be different and not have to conform to what is expected or laid down by culture, tradition or generational norms.
- Review your relationship with time. This, in my view, is the single most important boundary issue that impacts black life. Are you unconsciously rebelling against time? 'I will get there in my own sweet time, thank you very much.' Do you delay time? 'It will have to be enough if I just show my face at the end of the

meeting or event.' Are you expecting concessions with regard to time? 'Isn't it good enough for you that I tried to get within the vicinity of the expected time?' Are you fed up with deadlines? 'Don't rush me.' Are you tired of the demands of time? 'Don't touch me.' Are you angry with time? 'Leave me alone.' Are you mourning the loss of time? 'Why am I still hiding?' Any fight with time *takes* time. Disregard for time fosters negativity that moves you away from being close to your purpose and focus, preventing you from actualizing needs and achieving goals.

Scripts can be helpful or unhelpful. Eric Berne (1972, p. 136) offers seven elements of the types of scripts to illustrate how they function in different ways. Starting off are scripts that are **payoffs or a curse**; these are messages from our parents or parental figures on how we will end up. Then there are the **injunctions or stoppers**, which act as negative commands or prohibitions from the parent – these negate what we really want to do. There are the **counter scripts**, which, according to Berne, occur later in life and shape life plans based on parental principles or rules. **Model and copy behaviour** scripts begin to form from what we see and hear around us at a very early age. Then there is the **provocation** script, which encourages and confirms our script beliefs as coming automatically from the instinctive part of our make-up, which allows us to play and indulge. The **demon** script is always seen as coming from the unpredictable, impulsive rebellious voice that gives in to basic urges, needs and desires. And, finally, there is the **anti-script, the spell breaker**, which is a self-releasing freeing script, which saves a person from self-destruction.

You may find it helpful to know your own scripts. Make a list of the following types of script and take the time to explore and reflect on them on your own or in your counselling or therapy sessions.

The following suggestions are a guide to knowing your scripts, how they function and influence your behaviour, and for what purposes and gains you may hold on to them or consider it is time to reframe them.

Knowing your scripts

- Make a list of your generational and family scripts (include who or what influenced your internalizations).
- Make a list of general internalized personal scripts (which ones have you retained, and which have you ditched?).
- Make a list of your 'me-now' scripts (current scripts, both positive and negative).
- Reimagine or reframe your shame scripts as part of your personal therapy.
- If risk is the price of progress, then start to action your personal scripts.
- *Re-write* your historical enmeshment scripts. Identify what does not fit or serve you any longer and cease investment in these defunct scripts.
- Who taught you to be a man/woman? What were their scripts? In what ways did these influence and shape?

Review every six months for maintenance of good mental hygiene

Fight imposter syndrome

Impostor syndrome can stifle our potential for growth and meaning, by preventing us from pursuing new opportunities for growth at work, in relationships or in our hobbies and social pursuits. Confronting impostor syndrome can therefore help us continue to grow and thrive.

The following dos and don'ts are a guide to knowing your impostor syndrome scripts and get a handle on rescripting them for more effective agency.

Some dos and don'ts for overcoming imposter syndrome

- Don't let the saboteur in.
- Know your MO (modus operandi) and where you position yourself in meeting the white world.
- Don't repeat defeat.
- Know when you are fighting against the very things you want to correct.
- Get to know your hauntings (discerning who or what has just evacuated their mess on to you), so that you avoid becoming too contaminated.
- Know your *internal oppressor* so that you can take full responsibility for its preoccupations.
- Don't allow the *internal oppressor* to win.
- Be aware of your disavowals, that is, knowing what you give over, what you give away and what you give into that reduces your power to shine.
- Deal with shame-defeating scripts by reframing old values and belief systems.
- Be alert to when you might be playing up to stereotypes.
- Don't dumb down your authenticity or creativity.
- Engage in less guilt tripping of yourself when you have needs and wants.
- Know when it is time to stop remembering the past and let new energy in.
- Don't shut the door on opportunities to grow the shoots of your creativity.
- Don't wait for others to acknowledge your worth. Start the process yourself by celebrating yourself.

Add your own observations to this list.

Know your internal oppressor

The internal oppressor (Alleyne, 2004) is distinct from internalized oppression. It is a part of the self and ego structure that functions as an inhibitor, leading to problems with moving on. It inhibits movement towards negotiating the transformation process. As an internal inhibitor, it holds us back and can be viewed as the internal adversary or the enemy within. Be especially mindful of how your internal enemy works to make you question yourself, your worth, your abilities and actions. Get to know it as a saboteur. This is the part of you that doesn't believe in you and questions your every move because of low self-confidence and self-esteem. Get to know this familiar voice that becomes the loudest sound you hear, testing you and holding you back. Spend less energy catastrophizing because of the negative messages from the inner enemy voice. Give less time to thinking of the worst-case scenarios and worry less about what other people will say. Test out your desires, drives and wishes. Take calculated risks to remove yourself from your comfort zone and get used to *not* staying in your lane as dictated and expected by others. Give yourself permission to be, and do not expect to always get it right first time. Unfriend contacts who do not enrich your life, but who just take from your life and mentally expunge all defunct scripts that have become set codes for living your life. By deactivating your attachment to these unhealthy attachments, you will create room for new scripts and energies for self-advancement and self-respect.

The most powerful and proactive way to deal with the internal oppressor is to educate the mind for critical consciousness and exercise control over your life. Critical consciousness is an essential process for people of colour to engage in. It is the individual (and collective) work of coming into one's own being and knowing oneself. It is the vital tool needed to disrupt default patterns that are oppressive to us. Critical consciousness stimulates action that is the precursor to psychological individuation and collective activism for a more just and equal world.

Embrace the therapeutic notion of forgiveness

Forgiveness in the context of therapeutic healing bears little resemblance to the biblical definitions of forgiveness. Scripturally, this act of mercy is

privileged as being the process of forgiving someone or being forgiven. Forgiveness itself is defined as the letting go of sin, which is an act of obedience and gratefulness to God, and it focuses more on making reparations and reconciliation with the perpetrator.

In the context of psychotherapy and counselling I see forgiveness as being compassionate to oneself. In this therapeutic context, therefore, it is the process of healing through releasing or relinquishing the tyranny of the past. Tyranny can be the internal oppressor that holds us back. It can also be the arrested state of being emotionally ravaged by racial hauntings that cause a particular ants-in-your pants type of mental dis-ease or restlessness. Forgiveness is the active and mental process of letting go and soothing the soul. Forgiveness can free up mental space for new experiences to be owned and enjoyed. Forgiveness also frees up relationship dynamics that have been stuck for a long time. Forgiveness allows us to have the opportunity to work at improving generational family conflict, and thus change attachment patterns for more productive and meaningful bonds.

It is important to note that the unconscious process of hanging on to pain, shame and trauma might give a false sense of having something to do and may, thus, keep hope alive. But like any letting-go process that has passed its sell-by date, we run the risk of not serving ourselves well, and may end up investing in non-profitable attachments that lead nowhere.

Understand notions of freedom

The following list is both a catalyst and an invitation to explore what freedom means to you and its role in how you shape your life.

Freedom is ...

- Freedom is the art of knowing why you are picking up and carrying the weight others have refused to hold themselves and dumped on you, and when to put it down or give it back.
- Freedom is deciding when to lend precious time to deal with other people's projections and when to call them out and disengage.

- Freedom is knowing when to see (observe) and when to oversee (be proactive).
- Freedom is knowing when to look and when to overlook.
- Freedom is deciding when to care and not to care too much.
- Freedom is the art of remembering and forgetting.
- Freedom is releasing or relinquishing oneself from the tyranny of the past.
- Freedom is not being hostage to the *internal oppressor*.
- Freedom is having a reliable and sustained routine for your mental hygiene.

Add your own thoughts, notions and sense of meaning of this concept for your life.

Know when to step out of other people's dreams and into your own

Don't waste your time by making a bigger space for other people, while keeping yourself small. Collectivism and community building are integral to being an interactive and full social being, but be mindful that you may be hiding behind assumed scripts, such as 'I am a team player' or 'Going solo is not for me'. Find the necessary courage and self-worth to negotiate your own journey, which sees you graduate with the fulfilment of achieving your dreams and wishes. Inhabit the home of your own authenticity and award yourself all opportunities to actualize your giftedness. Make no excuses for negotiating this journey with style and grace.

Limit reliance on favours and waivers

Favours and waivers are unconsciously employed to deal with the unmet needs of not being seen, unwittingly assuming the victim position and