

Co-opted personas from the majority society are the assimilated traits that members of racial minorities may adopt in order to gain entry into the established privileged group. It involves neutralizing or dumbing down aspects of identity that are deemed by the majority to cause offence or amplifying perceived favoured aspects of one's identity to gain acceptance. In the psychology of Jung, a persona is the mask or façade presented to satisfy external demands; it doesn't represent the inner personality of the individual. Because the co-opted persona can reap rewards of acceptance and inclusion, one can think oneself into believing that it is the true self.

Check your stockpile of co-opted personas and get to know how you were seized by them and what price you are paying for personal convenience and gains:

- Explore the identities and roles you have adopted to be accepted in society.
- Assess levels of authenticity in these selves through getting to know yourself.
- How do these personas work for you?

Shame affirmations

Use the affirmations below to embrace loving thoughts toward yourself:

- I am worthy of love and healing.
- I release the chokehold of my past; it has no power over me.
- I choose to practise self-compassion.
- I deserve good things.
- I recognize that I am a courageous survivor.
- I let go of the anger and hurt I've been carrying.
- I treat myself with kindness and love.
- I am intentionally creating the life I want.
- I embrace the gifts and talents I have.
- I release all self-judgement and embrace self-forgiveness.
- I am on a journey towards healing.
- I accept myself fully and completely.
- I refuse to live in the past, for it robs me of my glorious present.
- I create beauty and joy wherever I go.
- I believe my future is bright and filled with good things.
- I am an integrated hybrid being.

Be a self-starter

A self-starter is usually described as an ambitious person who eagerly goes after what is desired. Such a person has initiative, drive and belief in themselves. A self-starter is proactive, has a go-getter attitude and likes things to be done. They tend not to procrastinate and, therefore, have a healthy relationship with time, as they see taking action as better than stalling progress. A self-starter believes in making progress and figuring things out as they go along. Such an attitude utilizes energy rather than remaining stuck in the romanticized notion that 'It will happen one day'; 'My day will come'; 'Walk in Jah light and Jah provide the bread'; 'One day!'

Guidance for black men

There is much that can be accessed about black men's health in the form of, for example, self-help books, black men's groups, tailored services that focus on mental health, systemic discrimination, the impact of negative racial stigmatization and the nurturing of black boys, and so on. The plethora of information available suggests the need for such support services.

In keeping with this chapter's theme on healing from the burden of heritage, I wish to highlight a particular phenomenon that has emerged over the years from my clinical work. It is the profound psychological impact on black males who have missed out on the active and sustained presence of a loving father, particularly in the crucial developmental stages of early life. Struggles with achieving a well-balanced manhood and male identity, relating to other men, actualizing fullest potential and managing issues of intimacy and trust in close affectional bonds are key themes for black men in therapy.

In the very focused work with black men, I have found the following facilitative questions useful for enabling black men to explore their male identity and sexualities, and discover where trauma wounds may lie for the work in therapy:

- What kind of a man are you?
- Who taught you to be a man?
- What is your relationship with women like, for example, with your mother or sister(s)?

- How have family dynamics impacted your moving-on process?
- What is your most profound positive experience of being shown love by a close male family figure?
- What is the most damaging experience at the hand of a significant male?
- What does your friendship network offers you?
- In the absence of your own father, what will help you to be a proactive ever-present father?

Guidance for black mothers

As with the above, the plethora of information available on black women's health suggests a real need for support services that address the impact of racial stigmatization that impedes the nurture of black girls and women.

I wish to highlight one key phenomenon emerging from my clinical work, which relates to the relational aspects of black mother/son relationships in the absence of the steady presence of a positive male father figure. What I have observed as a recurring theme, and therefore a phenomenon, is the profound psychological impact of a mother/son relationship enmeshment, which impacts in the following ways:

- Mothers become overly protective of their sons or exceptionally hostile if the son becomes a constant reminder of her emotional hurt from the abandoning partner.
- Mothers invest emotionally in their son's happiness, to the point where it is often difficult to know where mother's needs end and her son's begin. They are enmeshed and the son's maturation process into full adulthood either stalls or is completely stymied.
- In these enmeshments, sons become deeply entangled with their mother, and struggle to separate and form a healthy intimate relationship with an equal other, as they choose partners who mirror the only intimate attachment they know, which is unhealthy, dependent and enmeshed.
- Enmeshment issues cause black males to be perpetually torn between two loyalties: to their mother and to a desired partner. Being torn leads to being stuck and ambivalent, unable to be separately independent of the parent and commit fully to their partners in a healthy and productive way.

- Being torn between two loyalties leads to many black males feeling stuck and unable to grow away from mother. They may view and experience commitment in intimate relationships as entrapment and this may lead to missing out on the opportunity to evolve into free individuals. When it comes to engaging in the process of creating a couple relationship, this might feel like a return to the mother/son entrapment. Such men may inadvertently earn the label of player, lone wolf or sigma male.

Finally, single black mothers are advised to pay closer attention to how they choose a partner after relationship breakdown. Choosing someone based solely on how they may get on with their children might be great in the short term but could create problems in the longer term. In such partnership bonds, women may overlook and lose out on getting their personal needs met.

Guidance for black trainers

From my experience as a consultant trainer and facilitator in a wide area of addressing diversity challenges, there is clear evidence that the catchall term 'diversity' is often used euphemistically to address thornier issues of 'race' and (white) racism that underlie it. In the broadest context, diversity applies to traits, qualities, characteristics, beliefs, values and mannerisms, in self and others. It is displayed through predetermined factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability (visible and non-visible), national origin, sexual orientation and other changeable features, such as citizenship, world views, language, schooling, religious beliefs, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic status, regional and work experiences. It calls into question many other factors such as identity, cultural inclusiveness and exclusion, and racism as a lived experience for racial minorities. The pedagogical dimensions of diversity are expansive, yet, in my experience as a consultant, diversity has become the more palatable, go-to word for organizations, rather than naming the specific challenges of race dynamics, unconscious race bias and systemic/structural racism in their workplaces.

This is true of my experience for the majority of 'diversity' training

requests in the fields of education, Social Services, the NHS and many areas of the private, public and charitable organizational sectors. This regular occurrence is not mere coincidence, but a phenomenon of our times, observed as a trainer in the field. It is as if the hidden message is: *Yes, we have dealt with gender, age and disability, and we feel we understand the temperament and disposition of Asians ... but the damn spiky issue is how to manage race and this, in turn, is a euphemism for How do we deal with black people?* It can often feel this is the bald nature of what is unsaid.

Diversity training takes place on many levels and its demand has increased exponentially since 25 May 2020, following the murder of George Floyd and subsequent reverberation of the BLM movement. The training involves an experienced trainer, usually black or Asian, being called in by an organization to work with predominantly white teams who have marginal diversity membership, who want to engage more proactively in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) challenges in the workplace. Often, a request will hide the fact that the real, but hidden, work is about conflict resolution between predominant white staff membership and minority black and brown team members. Other times, it might be about the 'new guard's' disgruntlements with the 'old guard', who, with their archaic principles and old-fashioned policies, drag their feet resentfully to keep up with the changing pace.

Diversity consultancy therefore addresses a myriad of individual and organizational diversity challenges; these may relate to policies, systems, procedures, workplace culture, ethics, identity, equality and dignity in the workplace. The trainer's initial assessment of what is really being requested is therefore key, so that they can delineate what is needed, how, and when. Such consultancy work places unusually high demands upon the trainer compared with those conducting other trainings. Added to this challenge, the current BBCCT¹ zeitgeist has generated very difficult and contentious discourses, all of which have compounded high levels of anxiety, which has become the main precursor to the demands for such trainings.

Consequently, I (and many other black and brown trainers), find myself in the position of having to carve out time not only to craft such training programmes, but also for thinking about how to field the anxiety projected in the request. 'Fielding' is my term for holding all the balls that come from unusual and different directions; it is a special skill of delivering complex diversity material sensitively, inclusively and mindfully, while

holding the sensitivities of people who feel naked, exposed, deskilled and anxious. In many ways, these are trauma signs and part of what a diversity consultant is confronted with and needs to field and hold well, while imparting knowledge, guidance and tools for change.

In such programmes, what is not known and heeded is the fact that diversity consultants are now having to bear the additional invisible weight of addressing themes of trauma, shame, pain, resistance, projections, and aggression, to name just some. These elements predictably and inevitably emerge from all diversity – but very specifically race – work. The aggression met, albeit often in a linguistically subtle and behaviourally covert manner, requires skilful handling and containment by the trainer. The extraordinary task is to be both a facilitator within the arena of trauma and people dynamics and an educator in the learning space where your group is vulnerable. This is exceptional work. The emotional drain from such careful fielding can and does take its toll on the trainer – a unique hidden cost of pedagogical diversity training. It is therefore difficult to escape the unavoidable vicarious traumatization in the process, yet as black trainers we seldomly speak openly about this emotional cost. My years of training experience have enabled me to manage these teaching challenges reasonably well, often supplemented by paid supervision support and debriefing via my known and tested ways of unwinding (a long walk by the sea and sweating it out at the gym). Nevertheless, the nature of teaching ‘diversity’ awareness is demanding on multiple levels. I am therefore very clear about how I honour my own professional worth and contributions to this field.

I call upon other trainers to do the same and to bear in mind the following care-taking tips:

- Keep an eye on how much you extend your work and mental health bandwidth.
- Ensure that there is adequate care for the caretaker.
- Be mindful of the insidious effect of vicarious traumatization, which is the fallout from holding other people’s stress.
- Be bold in asking for what you want and need, without being held back by the inhibiting voice of the internal oppressor or imposter syndrome.
- Accept when you have graduated into professional prominence and present this self without apology, but as a self that has been earned.
- Seek out like-minded peers to share and get support.

- Know when to say NO. Be mindful of overextending yourself. You are not omnipotent or indispensable.

Holding the tension for building resilience

I am aware that this book's title may leave the reader with a view that the black existence is one long, hard slog, the word burden implying something immovable and a permanent weight. Granted, burden in the context of black life does imply hardship, overload, rupture and more. *But this is not all of black life.* Such a belief would, at best, be a cock-eyed view of black life; at worst, it is absurd racist thinking that homogenizes a whole race. I am not going to neglect to create a proud and celebratory space for the multitude of virtues that black people possess and delight in, while, at the same time, addressing the burden. This is the tension in being black – and the challenge in a racially divided world.

The burden is created by whatever the majority in society finds difficult and intolerable within itself – this is evacuated into and on to black people, as if blackness is the default repository for humanity's aggregate mess. But, in spite of these real and ever-present burdensome experiences, what black people have suffered historically – and continue to suffer – marks the toughness of a people, made durable by the wonder of their resilience and aliveness of spirit. The trajectory is sobering. This diasporic group of people has gone through, among other realities: slavery, colonization, segregation, legal barriers to voting and education, police brutality, bomb attacks, the assassination of black leaders, daily discriminations, systemic and personal racism, right-wing extremist hatred, refusal of housing, public services, unemployment – all of this on the grounds of race and yet we rise. This is quintessentially the personification of resilience and, although the past is never dead, and the hauntings continue against our will ... I leave it to Maya Angelou as she says it best in her poem that speaks to the concept of transformation.

And Still I Rise

You may write me down in history.
 With your bitter, twisted lies,
 You may trod me in the very dirt
 But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moon and like suns,
With certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Digging in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes.
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise?
That I dance like I've got diamonds at the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame.
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain.
I rise
I am a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

'Still I Rise' from *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems* by Maya Angelou

