

WHICH WOMEN? WHAT FEMINISM?

Aileen Alleyne

This chapter will start by highlighting some important differences for black women in the debate on feminism. It will then explore the author's thesis which is presented within the "Cycle of Events", and which is seen as intrinsic and central to black women's experience of oppression. The chapter ends with a look at some particular concerns raised within the Cycle and its implications for psychotherapy practice.

The use of the term 'black' will be confined to women and men with **known** black African ancestry. The author is aware of other sections of the 'black' community who might share similar experiences of racism and cultural oppression, however in this chapter, she will not be able to address these important nuances and will therefore focus on a few areas pertinent to the black experience.

WHAT CONSTITUTES BLACK FEMINISM

First of all, it is important to acknowledge that there are areas of commonality amongst all women. It would be true to say however that the term feminism clearly carries different meanings for black and white women. Although we might agree with the main tenets which broadly speaking, relate to the debunking of female gender stereotypes and the continued struggle for equal rights and opportunity with men, feminism for black women has at its core a historical importance which is borne out in black/white relationships. This crucial history has created a transgenerational transmission of trauma, which is heavily compounded by present day experiences of cultural oppression and racism. The links with the living past affect black people's Present and threatens to shape our Future. I am suggesting that from an intra-psychic perspective, this dynamic has become the main psychological pivot for all our actions and that which underpins a main part of what feminism is about for the black woman.

Being a feminist is a label which most black women in Britain seem reluctant to own and wear in the same way as their white female counterparts. The reasons for this are probably as diverse as the differences that exist between black people, but in the

words quoted by Jolly (1991: 4) of Grace Mera Molisa in her speech to the First National Conference of Vanuaaku Women on Efate, in 1978, we might get a bit closer to what is felt about feminism by a lot of black woman.

Women's liberation or Women's lib is a European disease to be cured by Europeans. What we are aiming for is not just women's liberation but a total liberation. A social, political and economic liberation. Our situation is very different to that of European women. Look around you and see, especially in town. Hundreds of our women slave everyday for white women. They cook, clean, sweep, and wash shit for crumbs from European women. European women thought up Women's Liberation because they didn't have enough to do, and they were bored out of their minds. They wanted to be liberated so they could go out and work like men. They were sick of being ornaments in the house. They hate their men for it. That's not our position at all. Our women always have too much to do. Our women never have the leisure to be ornaments. Our societies are people oriented so we care for one another. Our situation also affects men.

(Jolly, 1991: 4)

Molisa's views might not be fully embraced by all black women, however, the essence of her speech might ring familiar bells for many black women living in British society today. No black person has been spared the effects of racial oppression, and as a consequence, we start, consciously or unconsciously from this important historical premise in our struggle for personal freedom. When we reflect on the goal of feminism which is the acquisition of equality and personal autonomy for all women, we can begin to put into context the chapter's question - Feminism and Psychotherapies; Which Women, What Feminism?

To examine this question more closely, the first acknowledgement which must be made is the fact that black women's fight for liberation predates white feminist

thought and literature. We have carried in our collective and individual psyches, a history of enslavement and racial oppression through the generations. This powerful intra-psychic experience has profoundly influenced our relationships with ourselves, with the white other and has shaped our determinism. White feminism does not address this history of which its subjects - white men and women, have played a part and have also been powerfully affected. The tendency to believe that the effects of our shared history had devastating psychic effects on black people only is a myth. My philosophical standpoint is that both blacks and whites carry different emotional burdens and responsibilities of this history for which we must honour and own as part of our respective intra-psychic make-ups. From this position, I as a black woman, am put more in touch with how intimate black/ white relations are, as if tied together by an important historical umbilical cord. The use of this analogy will play an important part in the discussion to follow.

The *fundamental* difference for me therefore between black and white feminism is that the black woman's struggle has been borne out of a strong conscious recognition of this important history which has shaped her relationship to the white Other. As a consequence, we must see the black woman's needs for personal freedom and autonomy in the context of the bigger struggle, *a black people's struggle*. Black feminism parallels this struggle in the work black women strive to address in their relationships with black men, with each other, and with white society as a whole. The difference highlighted between black and white women's struggle presents a challenge in the debate on Feminism and Psychotherapy and the recognition for an adequate understanding of black intra-psychic and interpersonal issues which must be understood within a historical social context. As stated earlier, history has left black/white relations with a unique, intimate, and pathologically ambivalent attachment amongst its peoples that distinguish it from other race relations dynamics. The discourses operating within our unequal and incongruous object-relations have been more rigorously examined by black American writers. Drawing on aspects of black feminist thought advanced by black American women, bell hooks, a scholar and writer of black women's issues suggests, that we first of all shift from statements like "I am a feminist" to those such as "I advocate feminism." Such an approach could "serve as a way women who are concerned about feminism as well as other political

movements could express their support while avoiding linguistic structures that give primacy to one particular group.” (1984: 30). Her view on feminism is a popular one which might be embraced by many black British women.

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels - sex, race, and class, to name a few - and a commitment to reorganise American society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires.

(hooks 1981: 194)

Other views on black feminism have been notably expressed by Patricia Hill Collins (1991) who offers a collective definition taken from the ideas of Anna Julia Cooper (1982), Pauli Murray, (1970) bell hooks (1981, 1984, 1989), Alice Walker (1981,1982,1983,1988), and other black women intellectuals. Black feminism is seen as "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualise a humanist vision of community." (1991: 39).

Alice Walker (1983) prefers the term "womanist", a term she describes as "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." She clarifies this position from the standpoint of being "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female." She goes on to say that a womanist is "not a separatist, except periodically for health", and is "traditionally universalist, as is 'Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?' Ans.: 'Well, you know the coloured race is just like a flower garden, with every colour flower represented'". (1983, xi). Collins (1991) notes that by Ms Walker redefining all people as "people of colour", she creates a solidarity within the collective human experience while recognising the need for individuality and self-determination.

One of the few books on black women's lives in Britain, *The Heart Of The Race* (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe,1985), notes the fact that black women had challenged the white influence of the women's movement back in the early seventies. They reflect on the fact that they and other black women were much more influenced by what was happening in black liberation movements in Africa and America and not by what the British voice of feminism, Germaine Greer (1970), and other white middle-class feminists were fighting about here in Britain. Issues which related to black women then were their economic dependence on men, childcare, women's role in the workplace and racism affecting black people generally. They felt these were not burning issues for white feminists, who were more concerned about abortion and wages for housework. This situation has not changed much over the years.

From these expressed views we can draw the conclusion that what underpins black feminist thought and experience is our history of oppression and the ways we have chosen to handle its effects on our lives. An aspect of this complex relationship can be studied more closely in Figure 3.1 (Alleyne,1992) which highlights crucial dynamics within the black person's intra-psychic journey, which I am suggesting has to be negotiated in order to achieve a sense of freedom and personal empowerment. From this diagram also, a route out of our internalised oppression is suggested, which requires work on the Self with the inclusion of the family and collective. Liberated feminists therefore, and the role of psychotherapy in black people's lives will have to take on board all that this work will entail.

The Re-Emergence of the True Self . . . The Black Experience in Relation to the White Other

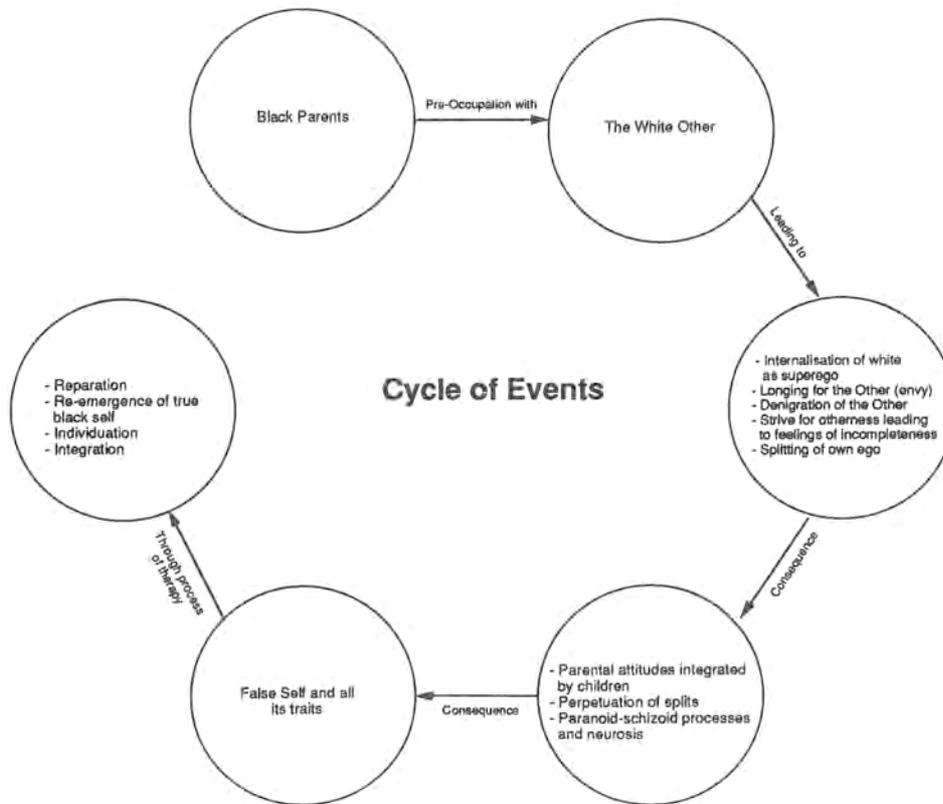


Figure 3.1 *Cycle of Events* (Alleyne, 1992)

In this diagram of the *Cycle of Events*, I am arguing the points that through the generations, it was possible for us to perpetuate certain false self traits by carrying internalised negative patterns of cognition about ourselves, particularly in relation to the white Other. I believe this complex internal process which starts at the pre-verbal stage and which can be seen in the example of the black mother rejecting her dark-skinned baby, can lead to a *false-self* in that child as it finds ways of coping with the rejection from its parent. The relevance of the *false-self* concept to feminism and psychotherapy thus becomes an important construct in understanding the black woman's struggle for individuation and her healthy negotiations in a predominantly white society. Furthermore, I am arguing that as it is not possible to erase history from our experiences, its facts and consequences then become crucial lessons from which

we must analyse, learn from, and move on with our lives. The psychological effects of black/white historical attachments, coupled with the virulence of present day racism, have affected this *moving-on* process, preventing full emergence of the power of the black potential. Within this arrested state, I am suggesting that negative self traits develop within a dependent *false* persona, suppressing a *true* identity and independent self. The thrust of the thesis is in the belief that a psychological metamorphosis is a necessary process of the black person's journey which has to be negotiated effectively. This journey can have advantages for the black client's healing process if accompanied effectively by either black or white therapist working in feminist or other modes of psychotherapeutic help.

Views on the *true* and *false* self, and truth and authenticity, are highly contentious issues in counselling and psychotherapy, and many readers would immediately declare having problems with it. However, I am taking a stance by embracing a Winnicottian (1958) view on this important concept of identity in which he distinguishes the *true* and *false* self by viewing the latter as being a defensive structure, a 'false' *adaptation* to an *environment* which has not met the needs of the 'true' self during formative months of infancy. He further suggests that during psychoanalytic treatment, patients with a *false* self must regress to a state of dependence on the analyst during which the latter can respond to his emergent true self. Rycroft (1972). Winnicott's (1958) emphasis on 'good enough' mothering in Transcultural terms is met through the 'holding' from the biological maternal source, the social environment, and the 'mother country' with which most black people with colonised backgrounds have had close ties. Our shared history and its effects may show that where Balint's (1952) concept of the Basic Fault has occurred within these settings, therein lies the development of false self structures for both racial divides. Additionally, observations from my own clinical practice suggest that it is not just an accident or coincidence that many black clients in therapy refer very naturally to the terms '*true* and *false* self' without much pre-knowledge of analytic or psychological understanding. This is very difficult to explain and may be a phenomenon which can provide some insights into the contents of the black archetype and its tendency to organise towards healing. The need for black people, and black women to negotiate this particular psychological journey - the Cycle - is crucial, and dictates the

discourses within feminism and psychotherapies. I hasten to add that what is not shown in Figure 3.1 and can't be explored fully within the remit of this chapter, but which must be a consequence of black/white attachments, is the white person's unconscious pre-occupation with the black other and all that is symbolic of blackness.

Depending on where we have had our upbringing, whether here in Britain or back in the Caribbean or Africa, it is my belief that we have all been exposed to various kinds of edicts which have been geared to elevating the white person. I am suggesting that this indoctrination for black people has contributed to a white internalised superego which has also been heavily influenced by colonised parental introjects. Few of us have escaped this experience which has shaped our adaptation to our environment. The differences amongst adaptation are as varied as the countries and home environments from which we come.

Additionally, if we were to think of black/white attachments as either parent/child or sibling relationships, I would further suggest that black people's conscious and unconscious pre-occupation with the white other produce powerful feelings of ambivalence as one would toward one's siblings and/or parent. These feelings can manifest in our longing for the other in ways which might be felt for example through our envy for the ease with which whites are accorded opportunity and access to things in society. Alongside feelings of longing, envy, and even love for the white other, are opposing feelings of denigration, anger and hate. Within this ambivalence, there is a need to manage these contrasting emotions in healthy ways which protect against the temptation to constantly react in an angry fashion or survive through striving for Otherness. Some black people may try to cope by employing powerful defences, such as dissociating, splitting, projecting and withdrawing from the impingements of a hostile, white discriminatory world. The effects of the latter defensive structure - withdrawal - can be seen in ways where the black person loses the battle completely to maintain emotional equilibrium and the ability to affirm her centeredness. This situation most often leads to a deep sense of ontological insecurity with emotional disturbance and mental health presentations. This particular brand of mental ill health is most observed by the splitting of the ego and feelings of incompleteness. Perpetuation of these internal dynamics are witnessed along generational lines leading

to repetition of parental attitudes being internalised by black children and the continuation of *false* self traits being observed in the new generation. The effects of internalized oppression on each generation are obviously shaped by current social realities also. White practitioners using traditional Eurocentric approaches to treatment misunderstand these presentations in their full cultural contexts and black people are frequently diagnosed as schizophrenics with inappropriate drug therapy and other medical interventions.

To illustrate these dynamics more clearly, the following two letters from a popular leading black magazine, *Ebony* (1990), and a brief clinical vignette from my private practice are included to illustrate the workings of the *false* self from different sections of the black community.

I am white woman happily married to a Black man for 10 years. We have two beautiful children, ages, 2 and 5. It sickens me to think that as my children grow up, they will not have the decision to be who they want to be but that society will determine that for them. They can't even be proud of being both Black and White because society will not allow them. If my son, who looks completely White wants to be considered Black, who will accept him?... Unfortunately, racism is here to stay. I tolerated it when I married my husband but cannot tolerate it where my children are concerned. Should they be treated differently because two people who love each other very much wanted children? I think not. (Ebony, 1990)

This letter illustrates several points relating to the chapter topic. We can empathise with the concerns of this white mother who is aware of the tensions and conflicts within black/white relationships which will have a direct impact on her mixed-raced children. Her awareness of *racism* from whites, and the *racial prejudice* from blacks towards her children, and particularly her son, is very much heightened no doubt by an intimate close and loving attachment to a black man, her husband. Her commitment to help her children develop an awareness of external realities, whilst enabling them to chose freely their own identity in a hostile world, identifies her as a *true* feminist and humanist, who will certainly play a crucial role in her children's

individuation process by providing a safe-enough environment which fosters cultural education for critical consciousness and acquisition of personal agency.

I am a proud African-American woman of African Native American descent. I have never, nor will I ever, apologize for my ethnic background. My hair, eyes, and complexion are God's creation. To apologise for 'not being black enough is to make an apology for God'.

The first point about this letter is in this woman's description of coming from "African Native American descent". This description tells us that her African heritage is black and the Native part, American Indian. We are left to work out that this black woman is probably pale to light brown in complexion, with eyes and hair revealing her mixed heritage. I think we are introduced to an individuated black woman who is affirming her own identity and difference, whilst firmly addressing an aspect of this identity which causes confusion for both blacks and whites who might feel she is not *black enough*. The question of not being authentically black, or false, may stem from our (black people's) difficulty in embracing differences amongst ourselves, and more to the point, not being able to recognise aspects of internalised racial oppression in ourselves which stem from a unilateral position to preserve a monolithic black self. The emotional elements of this struggle are tied up with powerful feelings of envy, hate, love and shame, and in turn creates a 'schizoid' transference (*not schizophrenia*) with the white Other. From the diagram depicting the Cycle of Events, it is clear to see how this kind of inner conflict can suppress the emergence of a *true* creative and emancipated black self.

The Case of Patrick

Patrick is a 38 year old black man who is in a relationship with a white woman. He holds a senior post in one of the caring professions and is currently completing his PhD thesis. Born to African parents who immigrated to England, he is now coming to terms with aspects of his upbringing which he feels have strongly affected his sense of identity and self-esteem. Patrick was fostered out from the age of 4 to a number of

white adoptive parents. He now realises that as a direct result of internalising parental colonised ideas as a child which had left him feeling “inferior”, he subsequently went out of his way to prove his worth to his white foster parents. His ‘survival techniques’ were manifest in his obsession to be the best at everything, and to be appreciated for his intellect which he over-nurtured to the detriment of an emotionally impoverished self. Patrick would intellectualise his emotional pain as a way of avoiding having to deal with feelings.

In our work together, a peculiar aspect of the transference-resistance was observed in the way he upheld the “Queen’s English” with a reverence that became both a coping mechanism and his trap. Patrick’s pursuits of mainly white ideals, (e.g. golf, opera, theatre) alongside a romanticised link with his “mother country” in Africa, had produced a splitting of the ego and a False, compensatory self. Patrick’s work in therapy focused on him being able to negotiate the Cycle (as depicted in the diagram) in order to work through the psychological consequences of his identity crises. By re-discovering a positive black identity that he could own, he was able to embrace both the symbolic black and white aspects of his Self, without splitting his real desires for academic aspirations, individuality, personal autonomy and a sense of true belonging to the black collective. A separation and subsequent split from his white female partner seemed inevitable as she held the brunt of his anger and rage toward his natural and non-biological parents. In couples work they both came to a deeper understanding of the nature of their bi-racial attachment which perpetuated paranoid-schizoid processes in Patrick’s thinking and relating. A contracted period of working together with this couple had also enabled them to examine and understand how the processes of projective identification had locked them both into a very unhealthy situation which had become both intractable and destructive.

From the above examples, it is not difficult to see how intimate the historical links are bound up between black and white peoples. What is presented as a major challenge for all therapists, including black and white feminist therapists, is the awareness and confidence to identify and work with opposites, that is, the symbolic black and white within each and every one of us. Within this shadow side, race is ever-present.

To summarise, the hypothesis within the Cycle of Events which I have tried to bear out in the ‘cases’ presented, I am suggesting that in order to find the *true* self, a self which is not wish to idealise, but present with all its flaws and foibles, the black person *must* find ways of separating out emotionally and spiritually from the white Other who has become the white parental imago. This imago which has operated over time has developed to a point where it functions like a filter through which the black experience is shaped and felt and sometimes acted out. I am claiming that this process arrests the development of the superego (as opposed to Freud’s (1924) resolution of the Oedipus complex), leaving the black person in a perpetual state of *adolescence*, dependant and always judging her/his worth in relation to the white Other. According to Fanon, “the black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. (1986: 154)

Within the practice of counselling and psychotherapy it is no doubt one of the most important tasks to address issues of dependence upon the therapy and therapist in order to achieve a proper separation that is necessary before letting our clients/patients go. This would be regarded as an important rite of passage which must be negotiated and worked through in all therapeutic alliances where the transference neurosis has been carefully developed. In a similar way, I am suggesting that a culture-specific transference neurosis does exist in black/white relationships. Our shared history has created a state dependence on both sides of the black/white divide. This relationship when coupled with the *real* transference in the therapy, will be doubly intensified, requiring skilful handling by the culturally competent practitioner. It is my concern that this expertise is a rarity and frequently resisted in psychotherapy practice, leaving yawning gaps in the white practitioner’s repertoire of skills and experience. Sadly, the black client’s journey is stultified, which in my view is another form of cultural misappropriation, raising important questions about what is cure and how we measure it.

It is also important to note that the process of separating out and working on *false* self traits can be done through means other than traditional counselling and psychotherapy in order to achieve the goal of individuation. This reparative work which, for examples, is undertaken in black women’s groups and the Black Men’s march in

America which was celebrated as a day of atonement, and other cultural experiences, can allow the space for therapeutic healing and growth.

The rest of this chapter will briefly highlight some of the issues at the heart of black feminism which may have repercussions for the Cycle of Events and the implications for counselling and psychotherapy practice.

CORE THEMES IN BLACK FEMINISM

Black Women's Relationships with Black Men

Black British women as a group reflect diversity at many levels, socially, politically, economically, sexually and spiritually. Many would agree that within this heterogeneity can be felt a dynamic force which is expressed by black women achieving at a fast pace and in many areas. “Sisters” are basically doing it for themselves by occupying influential positions in the job market, pursuing personal ambitions for higher education and academic achievement and investing in their personal and emotional development. The same cannot be said for most black men in Britain today. Although similar diversities can be identified within the black male population, full expression of the potential that we know to exist amongst our men is not realised in similar ways. This situation has created an atmosphere of concern, verging on a state of crisis, over the future direction for black men in British society. This concern includes those men who are our grand-fathers, uncles, fathers, brothers, partners and sons who face the brunt of racism in this society. What affects them will certainly affect us. However, the effects of the crisis go largely unseen in the wider community and furthermore, its importance is not given the just public attention and proper acknowledgement by black people ourselves.

From my observations, the far-reaching consequences of this crisis have created huge splits between black men and black women where feelings of jealousy, rivalry and competition are felt by black men towards their women who are getting ahead. Some are able to cope, whilst others reluctantly resign themselves to the situation, which

invariably changes their relationship status to their partners. Changes which are experienced in these partnerships produce conflicts with gender identity and issues of power and worth between the sexes. Within the black community there is a sense of estrangement from each other which brings with it feelings of isolation and loss. These are the dilemmas black women face amidst their own struggle through white oppression, and as we can see, her relationships with black men (not exclusively those that are heterosexual and intimate) are important to her life and add a crucial dimension to the debate on feminism and its therapies.

Intimacy and Trust

The theme of intimacy and trust is commonly presented in the work with most clients who seek help with relationship problems, abuse of one kind or another, and issues of loss and change. This theme does present in similar ways for black women. However, if we reflect on some of the areas discussed earlier in this chapter, namely, black women's relationship with black men, their relationship with white society and their relationship with themselves, it is not difficult to see how the themes of intimacy and trust can influence patterns of relationship dysfunction in these configurations. Difficulties in getting too close (intimacy) and the ability to let go (trust) can be understood in the context of black women choosing at an unconscious level to protect themselves from hurt. The *strong black woman* image although complementary, can also create problems for her in letting go, showing vulnerability and feeling able to ask for help. The work of the counsellor and psychotherapist in managing this theme is to enable the woman to feel trusting enough to talk about those issues that really matter to her and where *race* might be ever-present. Allowing therapeutic dialogue to be conducted when necessary in the client's native patois, Creole or slang if she so wishes, can aid the processes of fluency, fluidity and trust in the therapeutic alliance. The therapist who is able to authentically engage in reciprocal ways can help with the building of trust and bridge the cultural gaps much more quickly than the one who isn't. A more relaxed 'conversational' style of therapy which is able to interpret (not in an overzealous way) the client's defences, whilst allowing space to address and truly understand the realities of the external world, is going to be far more enabling to the client when addressing culture specific matters relating to the client's life. The baldness of the classical approach to therapy has proved time and time again to be

stiff, inhibiting and disabling for the black client. This is perhaps one of the reasons why there are so many premature endings within transcultural alliances and one which also contributes to the crisis regarding the scarcity of black clinicians who themselves have to undergo treatment for training.

Shame

The theme of shame is perhaps the single most important variable overarching much of what is understood to be happening in the psyche of black women and men in British society today. The word itself requires some explanation. Shame is described as the action to cover, to veil, to hide. It resembles emotions like jealousy, envy, spite, love, hatred, and pride. It might be related to feelings such as, 'I cannot see myself as I want others to see me'. This would become an introjection, which is taking in judgement and punishment by others.

Shame has been described as "a reaction formation to exhibitionistic wishes." (Jacobson, 1964: 100). In this sense it is a rigid defence structure built into the character and used against the risk of being humiliated, a risk viewed as continually present in cultural oppression.

Shame is interwoven with issues of narcissism, though the two realms are by no means identical. It is the veiled companion of narcissism. Shame stems from internalised conflict with an external authority (society) and guards against the boundary of privacy and intimacy. Shame in this sense, protects the innermost vulnerable bits of the self and defends against anxiety which threatens to destroy an integral image of the self.

Shame threatens our individual relationships with each other in the black community in forms where we act out our feelings of indignation, anger, and frustrations at other black people. Sadly, the acting out of these feelings is often done to those closest to us and destroys our relationships with each other. The effects of shame can be seen in our relationship with our children who face fierce criticism from black mothers and fathers whose intention to 'discipline' becomes synonymous with demanding

obedience. The need to control invariably leads to aspects of parenting which destroys the full development of the black child's self-confidence, autonomy and creativity.

Shame has played a part in creating difficulties for our group in sustaining social, economic and political collective efforts. Many a group effort have ended prematurely or aborted because we have lost faith in each other and ourselves. In this sense, shame leads to cultural isolation, which is the withdrawing from other black people and sometimes turning to the white world which is not as welcoming. We also act out our hurt, embarrassment, fear, dislike and mistrust by dividing ourselves into subgroups of, separatists (pro-black), anti-blacks ("coconuts"), integrated, and so on. Shame has left us with *complexes* about skin colour and accepted concepts of beauty for examples and about finding a comfortable sense of one's individuality within the black collective.

Cultural shame and its resulting isolation from other black people is one theme that can present both white and black therapist alike with immense difficulty, as it touches so deeply the night side of love, that is, that part of our souls which reminds us of our own mortality. The rule of thumb in beginning to address this sensitive area is to be alert to the temptation to over-interpret, which can lead to devastating consequences of re-shaming the shamed. The overzealous therapist can become a danger to the client's progress.

Implications for therapy

As human beings we have a tendency to look for logical maps to offer knowledge and meaning to the unknown and the unfamiliar. The terrain of inter-cultural therapy carries no such maps or recipes; no formulas and no particular scientific psychological techniques. Instead, what we have are guidelines for dealing with the illogical and irrational that is part of human nature in managing *difference*. The following six principles suggest that (a) we pay attention to our **approach** to the therapy which must create a synthesis between extra and inter-psychic factors, (b) that the **philosophy** underpinning feminist/transcultural practice must create room for the inclusion of work on issues of racism and its influence on the development of a racial

and self-identity, (c) that we acknowledge the full **context** in which black women (and men) live their lives in a predominantly white society, (d) that we strive to be more skilful in **identifying culturally specific phenomena**, (e) that we need to be committed to **sustaining the journey** with the black client to its mature end, and (f) that we re-evaluate yardsticks for **measuring effective outcome and cure**. Transcultural competence demands a rigour from the therapist to understand these principles and appropriately embrace them into the therapy.

Working towards a *resolution of the Cycle of Events* is one of the very important tasks of black British feminist therapy. The basic therapeutic skills for working in this mode are no different from other forms of therapeutic work, but the demand for the therapist is to be authentic with the black woman is one that cannot be manufactured; it has to be acquired through a slow reciprocal process of understanding one's own racial identity development and its complex relationship with the Other. In my other work as facilitator and trainer in the area of working with issues of Difference and Diversity in psychotherapy practice, it is a common expectation of white practitioners from various therapeutic persuasions to want to assimilate this complex area of learning in one swoop; usually a half a day's session's worth of training, or a day if that much. The ability to contain, hold and bear what is difficult for the client, as well as for ourselves as practitioners, are key factors in this debate. Likewise for the black client/patient, her ability to truly engage in the work with various split-off parts of herself will require a similar kind of risk-taking. We can clearly see in this situation with the cross-cultural dyad, two cautious and equally nervous people whose ancestral relationships will certainly be re-awakened in the therapy with all its powerful feelings and consequences. Neither will be able to ignore the inner disturbance and its primitive effects of making it inescapable to re-visit the living past that has to be re-worked into the living present.

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Glossary

Black: Term confined to women and men with known black African ancestry.

Black consciousness: All that expresses group pride and the determination by black people to rise and attain the envisaged self. (Biko, 1972).

Black collective: A sense of community where feelings of belonging, familiarity, pride and common experiences are shared. The struggle for individuality can present real difficulties within such a collective.

Cultural shame: A complex and private emotion which overarches much of what veils the embracing of a positive black identity. Cultural shame stems from racial and cultural stereotypes internalised by the individuals and leads to cultural complexes.

False self: A Winnicottian term which views this concept of identity as a defensive structure, a false adaptation to an environment which has not met the true self.

Internalization: Term used synonymously with introjection and is a process in which perceptions of the external world are converted into images which become permanent fixtures within our psyches.

Individuation: A Jungian term which explains the process of becoming whole; an individual who is separate and different from others.

Racism: ‘Any behaviour or pattern of behaviour that tends to systematically deny access to opportunities or privileges to members of one racial group while perpetuating access to opportunities and privileges to members of another racial group’. (Ridley, 1989). Others who do not actively contribute to this oppression may nonetheless benefit from it.

Transgenerational transmission of trauma: A collective’s response to historical trauma, e.g. Slavery, Semitism, which is passed down the generations and is repeated in a number of unconscious and most times *defensive* ways to deal with narcissistic wounding of the past.

Paranoid-schizoid processes: These are Melanie Klein’s phases of infant development to which the adult returns to deal with innate destructive impulses by splitting. Failure to leave the paranoid-schizoid position is responsible in Klein’s view not only for many psychiatric disorders, but also for obsessional pre-occupation in which the bad object forms the core of the super-ego. See (Segal, 1964).

Womanist: A term used by Alice Walker (1983) to clarify the position of black woman’s struggle for solidarity with their black men whilst seeking individuality and self-determination for themselves.

