

JOHN BOWLBY MEMORIAL CONFERENCE
2018

SHAME AND BLACK IDENTITY WOUNDING...
THE LEGACY OF INTERNALISED OPPRESSION

BY
DR AILEEN ALLEYNE

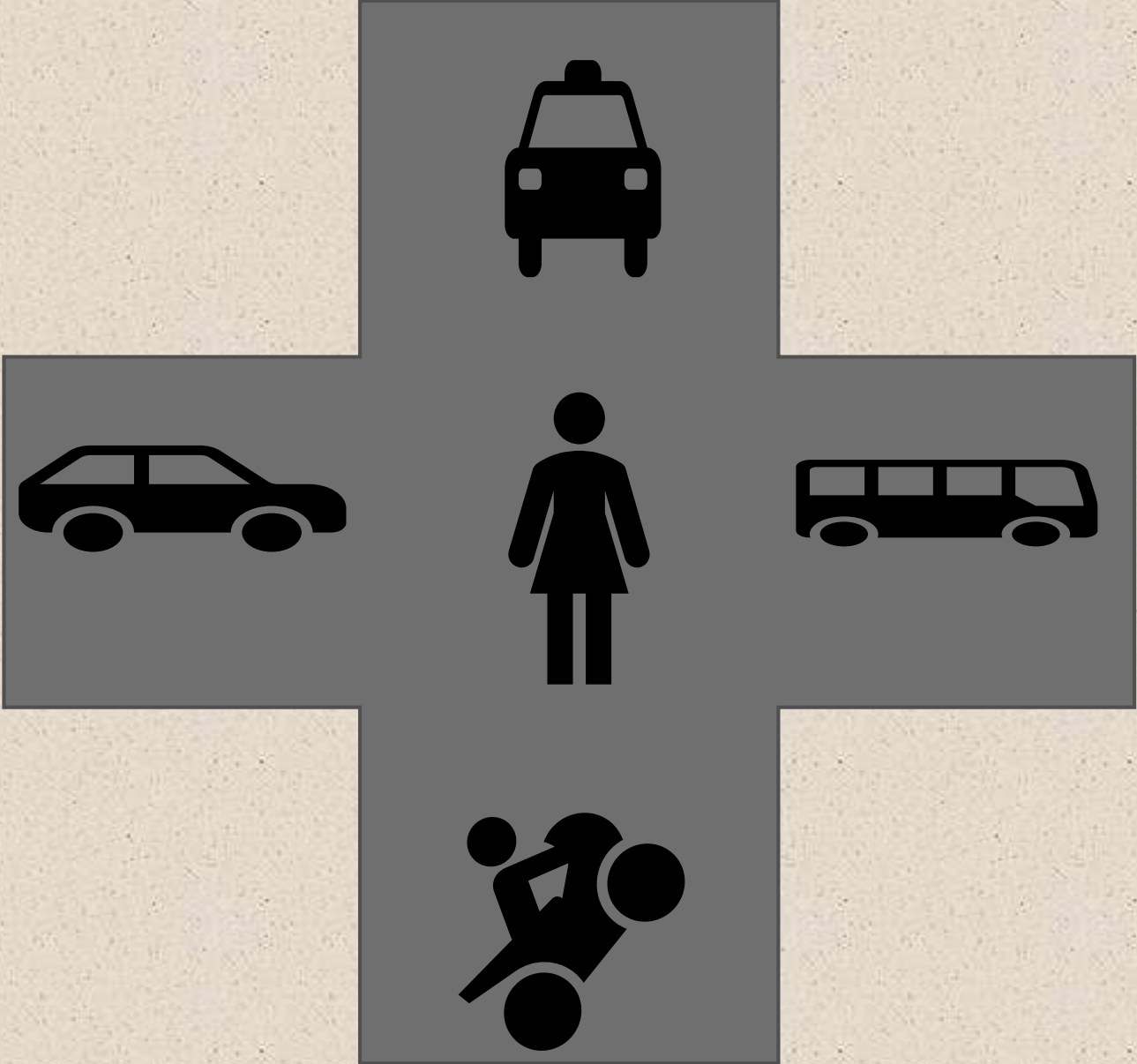
"Shame told me there was something fundamentally wrong with me and those who looked like me. Society said so and I accepted that I was inferior; I was the Other; I was a mistake. Life then became a task to do rather than a journey to enjoy. I had bought into the lie."

- **black identity shame**
- **black identity wounding**

Intersectionality - coined in 1989 by legal American scholar, Kimberle' Crenshaw

Before Crenshaw, many people viewed social identity as a single distinct quality.

Intersectionality is the theory that every individual has multiple social identities that intersect. It is the intersections of these identities that shape both how we perceive the world, and how the world perceives us.

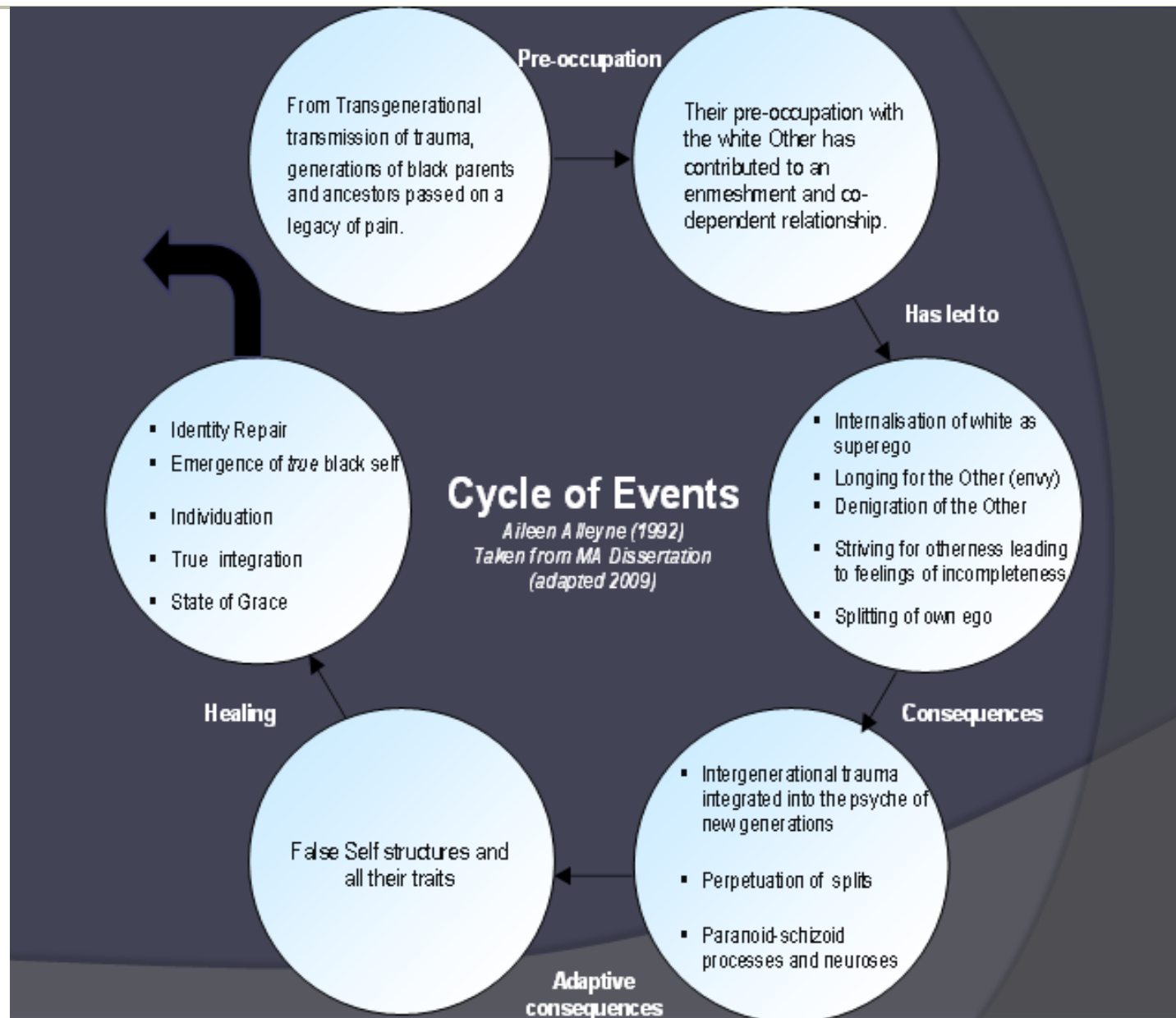


Intergenerational Trauma or Transgenerational Trauma

...is what happens when untreated trauma and stress experienced by survivors, is passed on to second and subsequent generations.

Type 3 Trauma

- Historic
- Invasion of people by a foreign invader
- Recurrent epidemics
- Starvation
- Subjugation
- Colonisation e.g. the rule of the British Empire over many indigenous peoples of the world, and the appropriation of their wealth for its own benefits



How is the trauma passed on?

- through parenting practices
- through family scripts that shape thinking and behaviours
- through our internalised belief and value systems
- from the impact on our mental health as we face challenges in everyday life

Na'im Akbar (1979) & Joy DeGruy Leary (2005) address the concept...

“post-traumatic [slave] syndrome”,

...which they see as pathology from holding on to **ancestral baggage**.

Cultural 'scripts' – entitlement or impediment?

Scripts highlighting black archetypal experiences

1. “People will always see your colour first and personality second”
2. “We have to work twice as hard to be noticed”
3. “No matter how much we succeed, people will always try to beat you down
4. “We can't afford to wash our dirty linen in public – that's like giving white people ammunition - we must stick together”

Scripts indicating a defensive (*protective*) mindset and value system

1. “I am not interested in theory – I go by my instincts”
2. “What’s the point in trying – you’ll only get no for an answer”
3. “I am not interested in promotion – it forces you to conform to the system - I don’t want to loose who I am as a black person”
4. “I don’t do deference where white people are concerned”
5. “I can never trust white people - I have a healthy disrespect where they are concerned”
6. “You can’t afford to show vulnerability - people will walk all over you”

William Grier and Price Cobbs (1968) coined the concept:

“healthy paranoia”

to make a distinction between clinical paranoid disorders and the healthy state of paranoia, which is considered to be adaptive behaviour developed from being mistrustful of Whites.

During Prince Harry's visit to Jamaica in 2012, Jamaican Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller, publicly said she wants Britain to apologise for 'wicked and brutal' slavery.....(but still can't resist giving him a hug).



Dark Girls Video

<http://player.vimeo.com/video/24155797?title=0&byline=0&portrait=0&autoplay=1>

How do we address this shame phenomenon in the consulting room?

First, acknowledge the **impact of a Type 3 trauma**,. Use a trauma approach in the clinical work. Work therapeutically with both manifest and latent contents of the client's presenting crisis and pain. Remember, this can occur at the intersection of gender, race, class and ethnicity.

Secondly, address **cultural and historical enmeshment issues**, with the aim of helping the client to separate out from unhealthy attachment and re-enactments patterns, and individuate.

Enable the client to achieve a deeper sense of **reflexivity**, which is a way of being in the world that is not shaped only by our environment and society, but by their own norms and values, tastes, desires, and so on.

Thirdly, offer psycho-education of the workings of “**The Internal Oppressor**” (Alleyne, 2006) to create understanding of the effects of holding onto re-activated historical trauma. The internal oppressor is distinct from internalised oppression in that it is an aspect of the self. It is **the enemy within**. Address shame that exists in this place where we are hostage to our past.

Fourthly, enable the client to tune out expressions of black rage and pain and delight in their own distinct hybrid vigour. Build shame resilience through authentic pride. In this psychic state, we achieve **a state of grace**.

“the inner enemy is as much a formidable foe as the most manipulative [or oppressive] of associates.” **(George Bach, 1985)**

“freedom is what you do with what’s been done to you”. **(Jean-Paul Sartre)**

“if you find the psychic wound in an individual or a people, there you also find their path to consciousness”. **(Carl Jung, 1964)**