

THE HEALING GUIDE

INSPIRED BY THE COLOR PURPLE

PREPARED BY THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION 2023

Thema S. Bryant, Ph.D.

Contributing Editors:

Edith G. Arrington, Ph.D.

Kevin Cokley, Ph.D.

Beverly Greene, Ph.D.

Jioni Lewis, Ph.D.

Nnamdi Pole, Ph.D.

Shena Young, Psy.D.



— A BOLD NEW TAKE ON THE BELOVED CLASSIC —

13 COLOR PURPLE





INTRODUCTION

Your mental health and emotional well-being matter. Your decision to engage with this guide is an important commitment and investment in strengthening your relationships with the significant people in your life and moving toward health and healing. The Color Purple provides a blueprint for understanding the effects of harmful experiences in your life as well as the many possible healing pathways for your recovery.

You can use this guide as a personal self-help resource or as a group discussion guide after viewing The Color Purple. Black psychologists with expertise in facilitating healing and recovery for the community created this resource with you in mind.

Our vantage point is grounded in holistic psychology and the science of daily stress and traumatic (overwhelming) stress, as well as African centered psychology and womanist psychology, both of which emerge from the wisdom and experience of Black people. This perspective appreciates that we are all interconnected, worthy of dignity and human rights, and face interlocking systems of oppression. It is important for us to name here that there are margins within the margins. This means that while all Black people in the film are subjected to the effects of racism, locally and globally, there are additional identities that are made especially vulnerable. The film centers their narratives in important ways because we know storytelling is healing and representation matters. Those who are additionally marginalized as seen in the film include women, children, and same gender loving folks. We declare that Black Mental Health Matters and that includes the mental health of all of us.

We want to give you an overview of what this guide will cover. First, we will explain the range of harmful experiences depicted in the film that you may relate to in varying degrees and then we will explore the different ways those experiences may affect you, highlighting the impacts on mental health seen in the film. These effects include but are not limited to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, addiction, rage, numbness, distrust, difficulty regulating emotions, difficulty maintaining healthy relationships, insecurity, aggression, and isolation, as well as economic, spiritual, and physical health consequences.

Most of the study guide will focus on healing pathways. We will describe each healing pathway, provide thought questions and activities, and share resources. The healing pathways we will explore based on the film include (1) community support which includes sisterhood, (2) faith and spiritual practices, (3) expressive arts such as music and dance, (4) cultural heritage as a resource, (5) self-reflection and self-definition, and (6) strategies for resistance based in liberation and social justice.

We will expand our discussion of healing pathways by exploring a few other topics. We will unpack what forgiveness is and what it is not with the understanding that forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Exploring forgiveness also opens the important topic of the path to restoration for those in our community who have harmed others. The idea of taking corrective action is vital. Those who are aware they have harmed community members should consider accountability, apology, and corrective action.

The final healing pathway is psychotherapy. While this was not an option for those in the film, it is an option today and we will discuss the possible benefits of therapy, how to find a therapist, and other therapeutic resources such as self-help books and podcasts.

Finally, we will highlight thriving or post-traumatic growth. The film does not end with the main characters merely surviving but also thriving. Dr. Maya Angelou said, “Surviving is important, thriving is elegant.” In the end, Celie finds her voice, sees her beauty, utilizes her strength, reconnects to her family and community, and lives with purpose utilizing her gifts.

With safety and support, may we all thrive!



RING THE ALARM

Recognizing the Harms

We invite you to start your journey with this guide with a healing, cleansing breath and a sacred pause for gratitude to yourself for all that you have survived.

As we start this process together, we invite you to place a hand on your heart or belly and take three cleansing breaths. Often, we are so busy going through the motions of living that we need to slow down enough to pay attention to the condition of our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits. Notice what happens as you give yourself permission to take breath. Notice your muscles relaxing, your heart rate slowing down, and your breath deepening. You're worthy of this moment of ease. As you complete this guide, whether by journaling your responses or sharing them in a group discussion, remind yourself you can take a sacred pause and breathe as often as feels good to you. A healing journey is not a race to the last page. It is a gift that you give yourself. Healing is not instantaneous, and you are worthy of the time and energy that it requires.

Something about the idea of healing harms drew your attention. Acknowledging the harms we have experienced is a courageous act. We cannot heal wounds when we are in denial so an important question for you to reflect on as we begin this journey is "What are the harms you are seeking to heal from?" You may have gone to the theater already very aware of those harms or you may have found yourself relating to certain characters because of the similarities of your experiences. Harmful experiences can be emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, financial, or even spiritual. Some harms are single events and some are ongoing, some are committed by people close to us and some are committed by strangers, and some harms are caused by one person, or a group of people, or an entire social system.

There are different categories of harm, which can then shape the ways we respond to them. Some of us are harmed by the daily stress of life. Living under stressful conditions can cause us to be irritable, depressed, and anxious. We may seek to numb ourselves with substances, food, shopping, gossiping, scrolling on our phones, or immersing ourselves in our work. Along with daily stress, some of us, like the main characters

in the film, have experienced overwhelming stressful events which are called traumatic stress. Those experiences may have caused intense feelings of fear, hopelessness, and horror. Our lives and safety may have been endangered. These experiences can include traumatic grief and loss, intimate partner abuse, medical trauma, sexual assault, incarceration, and oppression.

Let's consider some of the harms we saw in *The Color Purple*. They included grief, family separation, rejection, forced marriage, sexual assault, physical assault, partner abuse, incarceration, police brutality, infidelity, and oppression (racism, sexism, poverty, colonialism, etc.). You may have connected to these harms because of personal experience, having witnessed someone else's experience, or hearing about the experience of someone you care about which we call vicarious trauma. You may also have connected to the story because you have engaged in some of the harmful acts against someone in your family or community. Seeing these stories may have awakened some memories you try not to think about. Staying present to see, hear, feel, and reflect on harmful experiences can empower us to shatter the shame and the silence.

Now let's consider the ways the characters in the film responded to the harm they encountered. Celie responded to the harm she faced with insecurity, shame, and internalized sexism (i.e., internalizing the idea women are inferior to men) when for example, she internalized the idea that a man should beat his wife to get her to obey as she had been beaten in her marriage. Mister showed his wounds by being verbally, sexually, and physically aggressive to his wife and children. Shug showed her wounded heart by excessive drinking. Sofia's initial response to the harm she has faced was a harsh, tough exterior and then post-incarceration she became a defeated, silent, shell of her former self. Nettie shares her broken heart through her tears, flight, and letters.

POTENTIAL EFFECTS

HERE ARE SOME POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF HARMFUL EXPERIENCES:

Emotional/Psychological

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Anger/Rage
- Post-traumatic Stress
- Panic
- Numbness
- Shame and self-blame
- Too many guilty feelings

Relational

- Difficulty trusting
- Difficulty forming or maintaining relationships
- Difficulty with emotional or physical intimacy

Behavior

- Substance dependence
- Emotional eating
- Excessive shopping
- Aggression
- People pleasing

Physical

- Sleep problems
- Migraines
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Injuries, bruises, infections
- Pregnancy
- Compromised immune system, asthma, cardiovascular disease
- Body pains

Spiritual

- Loss of faith
- Change of faith--Increase or decrease
- Change in spiritual practices
- Questioning Your Worth as a Person

As you reflect on this list, you may feel overwhelmed at the number of ways the impacts of harmful experiences show up or you may feel some relief in understanding the connection between experiences you've had and the ways you noticed yourself feeling or behaving. The good news is that healing requires truth telling. By reflecting and sharing in this moment, you take a step closer to wholeness. You start by acknowledging the ways you've been harmed and the impacts this has had on you. Then begin to work your way through the reflection questions below. We hope you will be ready to take the next steps to explore the various healing pathways offered in this guide. Many of them worked in the film for Celie and they may be helpful and empowering for you too.

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What harms do you want to heal? (They may be individual or they may have affected your entire family or community. If you are in a group, you can choose one of the harms that you are comfortable naming aloud.)

2. What effects have you noticed from the challenging experiences you, or someone you love, has survived?

3. In reflecting on the film, what was a scene or a line that reminded you of the possibility of healing?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE:

Rheeda Walker, Ph.D. (2020). *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health: Navigate an Unequal System, Learn Tools to Emotional Wellness, and Get the Help You Deserve*. New Harbinger Publications.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

You Okay, Sis?



Sisterhood can save lives. We see the gift of sisterhood and community support, most commonly called social support, throughout the film. Social support in various forms, from family to friends to romantic partners, has many mental health benefits. Cultivating healthy relationships can improve your health and well-being. Social support can be a protective factor when you experience stress and enhance your quality of life and life satisfaction.

Social support can take different forms. Some friends may be great sources of emotional support and encouragement, creating a safe place for you to express yourself. Some friends or family may provide instrumental support, helping you to meet practical needs like childcare, a place to stay, or resources to help you make ends meet. We heal, in part, in community with others through our relationships. It can shatter shame when we have people in our lives who fully see us and still accept, choose, love, and appreciate us. Good friends or relatives remind us of our worthiness and encourage us to be our best selves while also showing grace for the ways in which we struggle.

For Black women, the unique social support provided by other Black women through sisterhood can be healing and nurturing. For example, Shug encourages Celie to see her own beauty and Celie shows Shug care by washing her back and preparing her food. Celie shows Sophia sisterhood by visiting her when she is incarcerated and showing up for her even when she has lost sight of herself. Shug is set free when the father who has rejected her finally accepts her. Celie and Nettie reach a higher level of healing when they are reunited after years of forced separation. Mister finds healing when he is able to show up with humility instead of harshness and then experiences being accepted by the community, especially Celie.

There are important qualities of healthy relationships that we see in the film and which we can cultivate in our lives. Healthy relationships are rooted in honesty not public relations. The women in *The Color Purple* do not pretend or mask their truth. They are able to be their authentic selves in each other's presence, and they respond to each other with compassion, grace, and love. For Black women, who are often socialized to be a Superwoman and present an image of strength through any hardships, it is vital to recognize the importance of taking off that mask, being willing to be vulnerable, and seeking support when you need it. So many people long for true friends – those who co-create spaces where we can proclaim the Zulu greeting “Sawubona” which means “I see you.” If people do not really see you they cannot truly love you. It is healing to be seen and still be loved, honored, chosen, and respected. This is especially the case for those who have been harmed and who fear their scars disqualify them from love, connection, or community.

Healthy relationships also foster our growth. While some people grieve our growth because they benefit from our brokenness, true friends want us to be whole, well, soaring. The sisters in the film encourage each other to find their voice, use their gifts, speak their truth, and manifest their dreams. It is healing to connect with people who want the best for you. Those persons may be your relatives, chosen family, friends, a therapist, a minister, or community groups. It is important to notice how you feel and behave when you are in the presence of those you believe to be your friends. If they inspire you to grow, your relationship with them can be transformational and healing.

Healthy relationships don't disappear during the storms of life. The women in the film go through some harmful experiences, yet they keep showing up for each other, looking for each other, affirming each other.

This is sacred sisterhood. Some people will show up only when you're winning, glossy, blowing up, excelling, prospering. Many of those people will disappear when you have setbacks, storms, and shattered pieces. It is a healing gift to encounter the friends who will show up in your valley of the shadow of death experiences, sit with you, remind you who you are, and walk with you back into life. These relationships (platonic or romantic, family or friend) can give you the fortitude to outlast the storm and the hope to heal.

If you have those relationships, hold onto them and nourish them. If your relationships aren't healthy, you may want to first work on them, and then if there is no growth, you may need to release the unhealthy ones to make room for nourishing ones. Staying in unhealthy relationships delays your healing. Choosing to cultivate healthy relationships is one way you can choose your wholeness and healing.

JOURNAL PROMPTS AND/OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What has been a healthy relationship for you and what qualities have made it healthy?

2. What are your strengths as a friend to others and what are ways you want to try to be a better friend?

3. Following the example of the sisters in the film, what is one honest conversation you need to have with someone in your life?

4. Take a moment to reflect on your sources of social support. Who are the people in your life who can support your healing?
What are the qualities they provide that make them a positive and healthy source of support?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

Joy Harden Bradford, Ph.D. (2023). *Sisterhood Heals: The Transformative Power of Healing in Community*. Ballantine Books.

FAITH TO MOVE MOUNTAINS

Sacred Streams

In the film, we see examples of faith and the importance of using religion and spirituality to cope and heal from trauma. There are both positive and negative aspects of religious coping. Positive religious coping can be seen in the idea that God loves you and wants good things for you as well as in developing a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Negative religious coping is the feeling of dread that comes with the belief that God is angry with you and is ultimately seeking to punish you. You may identify with being religious or spiritual, both or neither. You may be nourished by organized religion or prefer an individual spiritual path.

However you identify, it's important to consider if your faith life is supporting your healing or causing you harm? Is the central tenet one of love and liberation or shame and condemnation? As you can probably guess, positive religious coping is associated with more positive mental health than negative religious coping. A significant part of healing is meaning-making so what meaning have you drawn from your harmful experiences? If you believe these experiences were sent by God to punish you, it will be hard for you to embrace healing and wholeness. On the other hand, if you believe God, your higher power or the Divine, is present to help you navigate these challenges, healing and wholeness will feel more accessible to you.

In the film a negative religious experience was shown with Shug and her father. Because she chose to sing secular music and celebrate her sexuality, for most of the film her father rejected her and showed her no love, grace, or compassion. On the other hand, Shug notes her feeling of connection to the sacred and the Divine, when she stops and takes note of the beauty of a field of purple flowers. Her father has rejected her but she finds connection in nature, in music, and in connection with others. Eventually Shug is back in a church and singing sacred songs, where she finds healing and reconnection with her father.

When faith is used to exclude and condemn, it becomes another harm. When it is a foundation for contemplation, gratitude, grace, and love, it helps us to heal.

Spirituality, religion, and faith traditions can provide an array of healing components through beliefs and practices. Research studies have described beliefs such as ultimate justice where, even if I didn't get justice in a courthouse there is a higher court where those who harmed me will be held accountable. The idea of unconditional belief and support exists where, even if people in my community didn't believe me, God knows what was done to me and supports me. Practices that can provide healing include attending services, reading sacred texts, meditation, prayer, listening to a sacred teaching, attending pastoral counseling, connecting with nature, or participating in various healing rituals.

While some survivors of intimate partner abuse credit their faith with helping them feel empowered to escape and heal, others note that their faith traditions made them feel like leaving an abuser was a sin and that they must stay and "submit." Other research has revealed that those with higher levels of PTSD had higher levels of religious participation. This may mean that when we are distressed we use our spiritual practices more or it may mean that something that is being conveyed in the religious tradition is heightening a survivor's distress and shame. The question for you is not just if you have a belief you subscribe to or a practice you engage in but what is the nature of that belief and practice? Is it healing or causing further harm? We are worthy of sacred spaces that facilitate our healing. Can you believe?

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

Given your religious or spiritual beliefs, what if any meaning have you given to the experiences that were harmful to you?
2.

What sacred teachings, beliefs, or practices, if any, have you found healing?
3.

Describe one scene or moment in the film that you experienced as sacred, divine, spiritual, or religious in a positive sense?
4.

How have your religious or spiritual beliefs helped you on your healing journey? How can you cultivate sacred spaces to facilitate your continued healing?

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Healing Arts

The new Color Purple film is a dazzling, culturally rich, musical. There is healing medicine poured into the viewer with captivating songs, soul-stirring dances, and the poetic language of humor-filled lines. All of this reflects the African oral tradition of word play heard across generations from griots, relatives playing the dozens, storytellers, preachers, rappers, and spoken word artists. The lush artistry of the movie is evident in the fashion, hairstyles, natural landscapes, and set design. Through the film's artistry the audience is comforted, warned, lifted, soothed, inspired, and healed with space to breathe, reflect, and rise again. While the characters face a number of challenges, the art ushers us in to journey with them to healing, empowerment, and revival.

In their research and practice, many psychologists have found that artistic expression can be healing. There are psychologists, and other mental health professionals, who integrate the arts into talk therapy and then there are professionals whose primary intervention is based in the expressive arts. There are dance therapists, drama therapists, music therapists, art therapists, and expressive arts therapists who use a range of mediums. Research finds that artistic expression can be useful in alleviating distress, promoting self-awareness, and facilitating self-expression. This is especially important given the research that shows that while traumatic events are often vividly recorded in our bodies and memories, it can be difficult to talk about or find the words. Whether harm occurs in childhood or adulthood, you can utilize the arts to address what has harmed you, its effects, and ultimately reconnect with yourself and others.

Healing is an art form. While some people invite the arts into therapy, there is also research that shows the positive effects of the arts for people who explore this pathway on their own. You may decide to share your art or simply create it for yourself. Creating art, sharing art, or witnessing and reflecting on other people's artwork are beautiful therapeutic choices for engaging with the healing arts. The arts can provide a sacred holding space assisting you in reflecting on and feeling a wider range of emotions, especially if by culture, religion, gender, personality, or trauma encountered, acknowledging certain emotions is challenging for you.

You might decide to try an array of artistic practices. You may have already tried some practices, without ever connecting them with the harms of the past or present. You may want to consider creating a playlist of songs that inspire you, writing a poem about one of the harms you survived, creating a collage with images and words that capture your healing journey, or try the empty chair exercise where you say to the chair the things you wish you had been able to say to persons who harmed, disappointed, and/or abandoned you.

While there is the beauty of artistic expression through an art form, there is also the reality that we are living, breathing art. In the movie, there is the triumphant moment when Celie puts on a fancy dress and red lipstick with Shug's encouragement. She moves from invisible to visible, from disconnected from the self to centered in her own being. Your artistic healing may be activated by a change in your aesthetic such as your dress, hair, makeup, or simply the way you carry your body, hold your head up, and enter a space fully as your authentic self.

A growing number of people are discovering that joyful movement, dance, yoga, and embodied activities encourage healing and empowerment. This makes sense given that we carry stress and painful memories in our bodies, especially when the harms we experienced were done to our bodies. Noting this, it is important that your healing journey not avoid, neglect, exclude, or shame your body. Some embodied exercises you are encouraged to try are:

- + Taking time to explore stillness and improving the quality of your breath.
- + Check in with your body often, noticing sensations/signs of stress, and respond with care/soothing choices. Self-massage, salt baths, rocking/swaying are great options.
- + Offer yourself healing touch by gently resting your hands on a part of the body that needs love and care for several cycles of breath.
- + You might consider places on the body that bring up feelings of shame or reminders of harm.
- + When we incorporate movement in our healing, we can dislodge painful memories from stuck places in the body. With silence or music, dance your way from grief to joy, or from despair to peace.

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did the music, dance, or visual artistry of the film affect you?

2. What art form have you found healing? If you don't consider yourself an artist or creative, think outside of the box. You might enjoy cooking, decorating your space, journaling, or watching movies.

3. Out of the art forms mentioned in this section, which one(s) are you willing to try that you have never tried (or you haven't tried in a long time)?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Gail Parker, Ph.D. (2020). Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-Based Stress and Trauma. Singing Dragon.

Shena J. Young, Psy.D. (2023). body rites: A holistic healing and embodiment workbook for Black survivors of sexual trauma. WW Norton & Co.

BACK TO MY ROOTS

Culture as Medicine

The Color Purple features the beauty, survivorship, and strength of Black people. The film is a tribute and testament to the glories of Black culture, revealing our humanity and our sacredness. African-centered psychology emerged from the wisdom and experience of Black people. Womanist psychology emerged from the wisdom and experience of Black women in particular. Both teach healing, wholeness, and liberation through alignment with life-giving values and practices.

The first principle is that we are holistic beings so we must attend to our full selves, mind, body, heart, and spirit. As you heal, it is important to consider what, if any, aspects of yourself and your wellness have been neglected. This takes us to the next principle of operating optimally through a care ethic. This includes both self-care and community care. In the film, Celie goes from not believing in herself, to receiving love and affirmation from her sisters, to finally internalizing that love and care for herself. The care and healing comes from the outside-in and also from the inside out.

As we heal, we shift from neglecting and silencing ourselves to finding our voice and agency. A key aspect of African-centered psychology and womanist psychology is self-definition. We are not merely the recipients of harm. We are not mere victims. We have identities collectively and individually that transcend mistreatment. It is the essence of our soul, which is the center. In fact, psychology means the study of the soul. As a living soul, how can you better define and care for yourself? Care can include resting, eating well, setting boundaries, and speaking up for yourself as “Squeak” does when she finally declares her real name. Along with being holistic, self-defining, and caring, our culture also teaches us the importance of inclusiveness. We are taught to see ourselves in each other. For this reason, we cannot leave any of us in the margins. In the film, the religious and non-religious are sacred; the same gender loving, bisexual, and straight are sacred; those on the continent of Africa and those in the United States are sacred; the children and the elders are sacred; and men and women are sacred. The Color Purple demonstrates that our liberation is interwoven so no one can claim freedom when others are left in chains.

While some oppressive forces falsely promote the idea that we must define our power and freedom by our ability to erase and deny the humanity of others, the Color Purple disrupts that lie. In the film, we see the centering of those who too often have been silenced in our community. In the center are the survivors, in the center are women who love other women, in the center are women who through the lens of White supremacy’s daughter colorism, have been named ugly and undesirable. African centered-psychology and womanist psychology breathe life into the parts of us that have been cast out, looked over, and underestimated. The film takes us from the margins to the center and declares our worthiness boldly and undeniably.

African-centered psychology also teaches that we are connected with nature and the natural order of things. While enslavement, White supremacy, and segregation have perpetuated the idea that as a people we have no connection with the earth, the reality is that we find healing when we disconnect from perpetual busyness and slow down to get fresh air, sit outside, go for a walk, water plants, spend time at the beach, and breathe unfettered. We resist environmental racism and reclaim our connection to all living things.

Finally, Black culture teaches radical hope, the belief and behavior that says despite oppression we can still soar. It is incredible that in the midst of racism, enslavement, colonialism, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, police brutality, and even community and family violence, our heritage centers the idea that at any moment with collective engagement and faith, things can turn around. Hope protects us from despair and anxiety, it allows us to persist, and empowers us to transform ourselves and the world around us.

JOURNAL PROMPT OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1.

When is the last time you enjoyed time outside or connected with nature in some way?
2.

What example of self-care or community care stands out to you from the film?
3.

Describe a time when you had a Celie moment of shifting from appreciating other people’s affirmation of you to being able to affirm yourself and declare your worthiness.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Na'im Akbar, Ph.D. (1996). Breaking the Chains of Psychological Slavery. Mind Productions & Associates.

Na'im Akbar, Ph.D. (1985). The Community of Self (Revised). Mind Productions & Associates.

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D. & Lillian Comas-Diaz, Ph.D. (Editors). (2016). Womanist and Mujerista Psychologies: Voices of Fire, Acts of Courage. American Psychological Association.

Linda James Myers, Ph.D. (2003). Our Health Matters: Guide to an African (Indigenous) American Psychology and Cultural Model for Creating a Climate and Culture of Optimal Health.

Kathy Russell-Cole, Midge Wilson, Ph.D., & Ronald E. Hall, Ph.D. (2013.) The Color Complex (Revised): The Politics of Skin Color in a New Millennium. Anchor; Revised edition.

Malidoma Somé, Ph.D. (1998). The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose Through Nature, Ritual, and Community. Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

UNTIL YOU DO RIGHT BY ME

Consciousness-Raising and Resistance Strategies

There is a pivotal, memorable moment in both the original and current version of *The Color Purple* when Celie speaks up for herself as she feels empowered to leave her abusive marriage. Mister, who has abused her for years, starts hurling insults at her. She declares not only her own worthiness but also says until he makes amends for the harms he has done, he will not fully prosper. In modern-day terms, she declared, “No justice, no peace.”

Celie’s awareness-raising or consciousness-raising had to come first before she could take action. Sometimes we do not take action because we blame ourselves for others’ mistreatment of us. We falsely think if we were smarter, cuter, better we would deserve better. Womanist psychology, a daughter of womanist theology, names the importance of being able to identify when you are being mistreated, discriminated against, and/or oppressed. Psychology researchers have found that being able to recognize racism and sexism is a protective factor, meaning it can protect you from the shame, self-blame, and despair of internalizing negative views about yourself based on other’s mistreatment of you. Black psychology recognizes the psychic and spiritual pain caused by racism and how internalization of anti-Black messages can damage self-esteem and a sense of community. The trauma of racism and sexism, along with internalized racism and sexism, can result in individuals who are harmed by oppression perpetuating this harm against members within their communities (i.e., hurt people hurt people). The intersectionality of social identities and oppression is, in part, how racism, internalized racism, patriarchy, sexism, internalized sexism, homophobia and internalized homophobia operate collectively to perpetuate oppression. As you heal, you release the distortions and lies that say those who have been harmed are responsible for the behaviors of those who harmed them. The truth is that it is not your fault if you were abused or assaulted, discriminated against or harassed. Realizing that truth is an important part of healing.

Along with raising-awareness, womanist psychology teaches that the purpose of healing is not just to sedate you but to restore you so that you are able to resist and rise. In other words, while practices of care such as massage, manicures, aromatherapy, meditation, and drinking water are important, they are insufficient when you and your community are being harmed. Liberation will require activation. Some have called this resistance strategies. Others call it problem-solving or active coping. Whatever you choose to call it, you will need to combat forces of oppression and stand up to and/or escape those who seek to harm you. Resistance strategies can take numerous forms including marching, protesting, boycotting, advocating, voting, running for office, filing a complaint, and telling your story. Given the aim of oppression is to dehumanize you, know that embracing and affirming your humanity is an act of resistance. Along these lines, people have spoken and written about joy as resistance, pleasure as resistance, and even rest as resistance.

In *The Anti-Racism Handbook*, the authors describe some of the mindsets that can get in the way of us engaging in resistance strategies. We may be afraid, we may feel uninformed or unprepared, or we may hope that if we are silent and “respectable,” the mistreatment will stop. It will be important for you to

prepare yourself for resistance by reading and speaking with people who have faced similar struggles. It's also important to recognize that sometimes it is better to speak even when we are afraid than to continue to suffer in silence, and to acknowledge that as Audre Lorde taught us, our silence does not protect us.

Sometimes stress, harm, and/or trauma have taken our voice and courage. You may have experienced or witnessed that the harm you faced intensified when you spoke up. Abusive people try to control and dominate by silencing and erasing others. One of the painful things that you discover in healing is that some people like you broken because they benefit from your fear and insecurity. You will need to release the desire to please those who want to see you remain as a fraction of yourself. Of course, safety planning and support are important as you navigate these decisions. To resist you will need to go at your own pace in a way that honors the wisdom you hold from your lived experience. Some revolutions are loud and obvious and some are subtle and under the radar but still effective. You choose the pathway that aligns with you. The important thing is for you to get free and to be able to move toward wholeness.

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when you were aware you were facing racism and/or sexism.

2. Which act of resistance have you engaged in and what was the experience like for you?

3. Celie stood up to Mister. Can you think of a time you stood up for yourself or a way you would like to stand up for yourself in the future? Describe it.

RECOMMENDED READING

Thema Bryant, Ph.D. & Edith G. Arrington, Ph.D. (2022). *The Antiracism Handbook: Practical Tools to Shift Your Mindset and Uproot Racism in Your Life and Community* (The Social Justice Handbook Series). New Harbinger Publications

Brittney Cooper, Ph.D. (2018). *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*. St. Martin's Press.

Tricia Hersey. (2022). *Rest as Resistance: A Manifesto*. Little, Brown Spark.

Anneliese Singh, Ph.D. (2019). *The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing*. New Harbinger Publications.

Amos N. Wilson (Edited by Sababu Plata). (2020). *The Psychology of Self-Hatred and Self-Defeat: Towards a Reclamation of the Afrikan Mind*. AWIS: Afrikan World InfoSystems.

FREE TO FORGIVE AND UNPACKING APOLOGY

While some religious traditions hold up forgiveness as an important aspect of healing, most psychology models do not include it as a requirement for healing. These differing perspectives highlight the importance of meaning. We must define what we mean by forgiveness to decide if it is important to our healing. Let's look first at what forgiveness is NOT.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. In most cases, you will not forget the harms that happened to you. These are painful experiences that likely altered your life in small or large ways. It is a falsehood when people say if you forgive you will never think about it again. There are "triggers" or what some call "awakenings" that are reminders of our experiences. These reminders may be a place, scent, person, sound, or even time of year. You don't have to be ashamed of these reminders. You can practice various healthy ways to calm your nervous system and to remind yourself that you are in the present and that you are safe.

Forgiveness is not saying that what harmed you didn't matter. Sometimes we hold on to the sting of an experience as a tribute or honoring of what was done. If you choose to forgive you are not saying that the experience was insignificant. Forgiveness is not a judgment of the past but a decision for your present and future.

Forgiveness does not have to be instant. Some people never give themselves time and space for their grief, anger, and hurt. Celie did not instantly forgive. Throughout the film, we see Celie's husband, who she calls Mister, mistreating her. After she leaves him and he takes corrective action, she forgives him and says that they can try to be friends. She gave herself permission for the process knowing healing is a journey. We hope you also will not judge yourself for the difficulties you may have with forgiveness. Forgiving can be very hard and you should never be shamed for needing time. Statements like "Just get over it!" and "Just let it go!" lack compassion and are not helpful. Give yourself breathing room, contemplation room, healing room.

Forgiveness does not have to mean reconciliation. Celie was clear that she did not want to remarry Mister or reconcile a romantic relationship with him. Some people promote the idea that if you forgive you have to act as if it never happened. You can forgive someone and still set boundaries. You may decide I want to emotionally release this person or feeling but I don't want them in my house or I don't want to give them the same access to me, or I don't want any type of relationship at all. As one Black woman elder declared, "I'm not mad. I'm just finished." She had released the anger but still was ready to end her connection to the person who had harmed her.

So what is forgiveness? People define it differently but for our healing purposes let's say forgiveness is a gift you give yourself. It is a decision to not remain stuck in the moment of harm. It is a decision to no longer allow the presence or thought of the person to leave you undone. It is a decision to no longer be ruled by your justifiable anger, rage, outrage, panic. You may want to forgive yourself for mistakes of the past and you may want to forgive some people for the harmful acts they have done. The choice is always yours. Some of you may be reading this and thinking I absolutely do not want to forgive some people. That is your choice to make as well. You own your healing journey.

A Message for Those Who Have Harmed Others

Mister shows us three important steps for making amends. First, he had to see himself clearly, including the harms he had done. If you are in a place of being defensive or excuse making, you are not yet ready to move forward. As we would say in our community, “You have to own your stuff.” Once he took stock of his life, he took action to make amends or restitution for the harm he had done. Sometimes you will make amends to a specific person. Sometimes you make amends by offering services or funds to people who were harmed in a similar way if the person whom you harmed is not known to you, is deceased, or does not want any contact with you. Finally, Mister showed up with humility. It does not work to assume you are entitled to forgiveness or to be angry about the boundaries that people put forward. Awareness, amends, and humility are important principles for those who have harmed others.

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you define forgiveness?

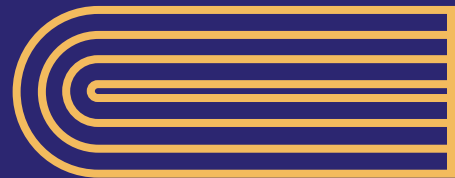
2. Do you consider forgiveness an essential component of healing or not?

3. Is there anything you need to forgive yourself for or anyone you need to apologize to and make amends with?

RECOMMENDED READING

Nedra Tawwab, MSW, LCSW. (2021). Set Boundaries, Find Peace: A Guide to Reclaiming Yourself. TarcherPerigee.

SPACE TO HEAL Therapy



While the characters in *The Color Purple* demonstrate healing and transformation in remarkable ways, they did not have access to a healing pathway that is available to many of us today: psychotherapy (or more simply, “therapy,” a term that many people find less stigmatizing without the “psycho” prefix). In this section, we will share the truth about therapy, and bust some myths along the way. We will also share why we invite you to consider seeking therapy and how to get started if you are interested. Let’s first address some myths that serve as barriers to seeking therapy from mental health professionals.

Myth 1: Therapy is for White people.

Truth: While it is true that Black culture and Black people lack a long history of involvement with professional therapy, a growing number of Black people have tried and benefited from therapy, as evidenced by both firsthand testimonials and formal research studies. It is not an accident that many Black people perceive therapy as a “White thing.” For many years, Black people were less likely than White people to be referred to therapy by their health care providers and when Black people sought therapy on their own, they would find that virtually all therapists were White. Concerted effort over the past few decades has led to an improvement on both fronts. Black people are more frequently encouraged to seek therapy when appropriate and they are more likely to have the option of a non-White therapist than ever before. The option of racial match with a therapist has been known for some time to be important to many Black clients (particularly those for whom being Black is a central aspect of their identity).

Myth 2: Therapy is for rich people.

Truth: While therapy can be expensive if you are paying out of pocket, most areas have therapists who provide one or more of the following: low-cost services, sliding scale services that are based on your income, and/or free services for victims of violence. Therapists-in-training often offer high quality supervised services at an affordable price.

Myth 3: Therapy is for people who don’t have any friends.

Truth: Talking to a friend is helpful as we noted in the section on social support, however it is not the same as talking to a mental health professional with education and training in strategies to help you address your specific challenges. Therapy also provides a space where you do not have to be the caretaker or strong friend that everyone else relies on. This means that you can get your needs met without having to focus on your therapist’s needs. It is a healing space designed for your care.

Myth 4: Therapy is for people who are “crazy” (and besides, Black people don’t get depressed).

Truth: Mental illness, stress, and major life transitions affect people across all cultures and communities, including Black people. Though Black culture teaches a great deal of resilience which often protects Black people from deep depression, therapy can be beneficial for people across a range of situations, from mild adjustment challenges, relationship issues, and family frustrations to more serious mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Therapy can also be used for prevention such as for persons who seek out pre-marital counseling to build a strong foundation for their marriages.

So What is Therapy?

Therapy is a confidential space where you can receive empathy and support to work toward the goals you have for your healing and wholeness. Therapy is facilitated by a mental health professional, who has the education and training to not only understand your symptoms but also to see you as a whole person, inclusive of your culture and the unique aspects of your identity. Therapists also often know specialized techniques that have been shown to effectively change negative thoughts, moods, and behaviors. Though therapist techniques play an important role in the process, research shows that client engagement and the quality of relationship between therapist and client are even more important to therapy success.

If you are interested in trying therapy, the first step is to find a therapist. You may want to check with your insurance company if you have insurance. It is helpful to find a therapist who has experience both with your current challenges as well as the aspects of your identity that are important to you, such as your race, gender, religion, sexuality, or their intersections. You can also use some directories that are general or culture specific. We include some in the resource list of this guide. It's important to know that therapists have different styles. These differences may be based on their personality, theoretical orientation, training, or social identities. If your initial experience with therapy does not feel helpful don't give up on therapy. It may be that a particular therapist was not a good match for you. We encourage you to try different therapists, when possible, until you connect with someone with whom you feel seen, heard, respected, and understood.

Research suggests that the average person who tries therapy experiences decreases in depression, anxiety, panic, self-harming behaviors, PTSD, panic attacks, phobias, distress, and insecurity. Some people experience these benefits with therapy alone and some people benefit from therapy in conjunction with medication. Whether medication is right for you will be a conversation for you to have with your provider. It is not a required part of therapy but it is helpful for some conditions. In fact, most experts agree that for some problems like PTSD and mild depression, therapy is a better first choice treatment than medication.

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you have ever tried therapy, what was the experience like for you?

2. If you haven't tried it, what has kept you from trying it?

3. Select a character from *The Color Purple* and reflect on how therapy may have been beneficial to them.

4. If you are in therapy or want to try therapy, what is a goal you would like to work on for your healing and wholeness?
In other words, what would healing look like for you?

RECOMMENDED READING

Robyn Gobin, Ph.D. (2019). *The Self Care Prescription: Powerful Solutions to Manage Stress, Reduce Anxiety & Increase Wellbeing*. Althea Press.
Shavonne J. Moore-Lobban, Ph.D. & Robyn L. Gobin, Ph.D. (2022). *The Black Woman's Guide to Overcoming Domestic Violence: Tools to Move Beyond Trauma, Reclaim Freedom, and Create the Life You Deserve*. New Harbinger Publications

RESEARCH ARTICLES:

Taylor, R.E., & Kuo, B.C.H. (2018). Black American psychological help-seeking intention: An integrated literature review with recommendations for clinical practice. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 29, 325-337.
Thompson, V.L. Sanders, Bazile, A., Akbar, M. (2004). African Americans' perceptions of psychotherapy and psychotherapists. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 35, 19-26.

RESOURCE LINKS:

<https://locator.apa.org/>
<https://abpsi.site-ym.com/search/custom.asp?id=5934>
<https://www.verywellmind.com>

CONCLUSION

Thriving, Growth, and Coming Home to Yourself

Thank you for being here, and for seeing your healing through to the last section of the guide. Your choices to invest time, energy, and reflection on your healing journey are celebrated! Remember, Celie's journey did not end with her escaping a harmful situation. The harm happened, and she chose to heal and rebuild her life. What about you? You survived and you've made it this far, and yet can you imagine that there is more for you? You are worthy of living beyond survival mode.

You are worthy of reconnecting with yourself, honoring yourself, and loving yourself. You are worthy of your own love and care. Invite that self-affirmation into your decision-making, relationships, and behaviors. You are worthy of shifting from a life of surviving to thriving; into a life that puts you in touch with abundance, peace, joy, and optimal living – whatever that means for you. You deserve a relationship with yourself that is free of self-harming, self-destructive, or self-sabotaging ways of being. Reconnecting with your sense of purpose, passions, things that bring you fulfillment, and perhaps things you enjoyed before you were harmed.

Healing and shifting into a thriving way of life is a continuous zig-zagging process. You are encouraged to continue exploring ways to nourish your self-confidence, try on new skills, improve relationships, find meaning, practice gratitude, and even deepen your sense of spirituality or the sacred. By the end of the film, Celie has friends, a business using her talent, positive family connections, and a strong belief in herself. You're invited to consider what shifting beyond survival mode into a thriving existence requires of you.

The truth is you may have engaged in some behaviors or adopted certain mindsets to survive terrible situations. In order to thrive you may need to trade in some of those old approaches and lean into the discomfort of learning new ones. Growing pains, setbacks, and detours are a natural part of the process and practicing self-compassion can be an amazing way to support yourself. You are growing, evolving, and becoming more authentically you. Liberation and healing look good on you. If it aligns with you, you're invited to take a moment to embrace yourself and take the sweetest cleansing breath. This is not a final step but a commencement, a new beginning, as you approach the next path on your healing journey. We hope you will return to this guide and these steps again and again, for as long as you need to. Most of all, like Celie, we truly hope you can see and celebrate who you are and who you are becoming!

JOURNAL PROMPTS OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways, if any, have you felt stuck in survival mode?

2. What do you imagine thriving looks like for you?

3. What is one thing you can do to support your transition from surviving to thriving?

RECOMMENDED READING

Thema Bryant, Ph.D. (2022). *Homecoming: Overcome Fear and Trauma to Reclaim Your Whole, Authentic Self*. TarcherPerigee.

NOTES

[illegible]

NOTES

[illegible]

[illegible]



— A BOLD NEW TAKE ON THE BELOVED CLASSIC —

THE COLOR PURPLE

#THECOLORPURPLE

