

The nuances of the Blindian experience and ways to begin the healing journey



Racial Trauma:

The cumulative/collective impact of discrimination and prejudice based on race. Members of Blindian relationships may have unique experiences that are representative of racial traumatic stress

Racial Traumas in Blindian Relationships Include:

Family Rejection

Gaslighting

Disownment

Silent Complacency

Forced Choices

Stonewalling

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Family Rejection:

In Blinidan communities, many families will outwardly reject relationships outside of their culture of origin. For example, in South Asian communities families may assert their disapproval of Black individuals entering their spaces in any capacity. This includes both romantic relationships and friendships for their children.

Anti-Blackness:

Anti-blackness can often be a driving force in "Family Rejection" practices in the Blinidan relationship. Anti-blackness are attitudes and practices that dehumanize and oppress black people in order to maintain principles of white supremacy. Anti-blackness is prevalent in white communities and most non-black communities as a general frame of reference as a result of colonization.

Gaslighting:

Gaslighting is a form of manipulation in which an individual is confused into thinking their responses, feelings, thoughts, etc. are overreactions. This frequently happens for Black couples when undergoing the task of introducing the partner to the community. Many family members may overtly claim their anti-racism and approval; however, their actual actions may suggest otherwise. They may minimize your Black partner's experiences of racism and prejudice in this process by denying the role they have played, because they can't be racist-they're your family right?!

Disownment:

It is not uncommon for children to be disowned/removed from the home and community due to their choice to date outside of the culture. For South Asian members of the partnership, this may be especially prominent due to the antiBlack sentiment that is deep-rooted in South Asian culture.

Silent Complacency:

South Asian communities are collectivist cultures. Which means they tend to operate by promoting the family unit, rather than the individual. This also means they have a strong group think ideology. If a senior member of the family unit feels strongly about something, no matter how wrong that ideology may be, other members of the family rarely speak out in disagreement of these beliefs. They become passive observers of the trauma that Indian couples experience in these spaces and tend to side with the oppressor out of a fear of retribution or disownment themselves. This silence is complacency.

Collectivist:

Collectivist cultures prioritize the needs of the community/group over the needs of the individual. Many Asian communities are collectivist in nature.

Individualistic:

Individualistic cultures identify the needs of the individual as an emphasis over the needs of the group. In these cultures, ideology of independence and autonomy is promoted. Many Westernized communities operate from an individualist lens

Forced Choices:

Many times members of Blindian couples are forced to choose the person they love or the support/love of their families. Dismantling antiBlackness is a process and throughout this process, the couple will be challenged to make a choice between their individual needs or that of the family. You may hear, “what will people say?!” in efforts to promote the family’s interest. This can directly impact the health of the Blindian couple as well as the mental health of each individual when forced to make such unnecessary choices.

Stonewalling:

Stonewalling is a refusal to communicate or cooperate. It's not uncommon for Blindian couples to face stonewalling from family members. They may place unrealistic goals/demands as precursors to communication (i.e. "we will only meet your partner after you complete your degree"), or they may disengage in the conversation about your partner completely. Some family members may choose not to include your partner in gatherings/activities despite their knowledge of your relationship. They may continue to freeze out your partner over the years during discussions of "family" matters by overtly excluding your partner in these discussions. All of these experiences can be subtle and minute, but over time, the cumulative effects can be taxing.

Stigma:

A mark of disgrace/shame often influenced by socio-cultural views

South Asian Stigmas:

Given the collectivist nature of South Asian communities, many socio-cultural beliefs promote stigmas in society. These stigmas directly impact the health of Indian relationships and the individual experiences within these relationships

South Asian Stigmas Include:

Anti-blackness

High Achievement

Collectivism

Perfectionism

AntiBlackness

Anti-black sentiment is pervasive in South Asian cultures (i.e. colorism and caste inequalities). It impacts all relationship-building decisions to include friendships and marriages. An individual's worth is determined ultimately by the color of their skin (i.e. a dark-skinned woman who owns her own business is "difficult to match" bc she is not "attractive"). Choosing to date/marry dark-skinned individuals directly challenges these deep-rooted problematic ideologies. Because of this, family members may disengage the Indian couple because of societal stigma in efforts to avoid shame or "save face" within the community.

Collectivism

Collectivist cultures stress obedience, honor, and family loyalty. Pursuing love interests that are in the best interest of the individual are in direct opposition of this ideology and the family's wishes/need for conformity (i.e. being assertive of your own needs makes you less appealing and "difficult"). Pursuing love interests with a Black individual adds another layer of diversion from family conformity. Not only are you disregarding family wishes, you are pursuing interests that are culturally viewed as "negative" and against the grain.

Family Rejection Through Achievement

South Asian communities expect high achievement in their children. Families tend to express love/acknowledge your worth based on your achievements and successes-conditional love. Families emphasize when children are not living up to these expectations (e.g. “Seema’s daughter got into Harvard for her premed, you only got into NYU”). “Keeping up with the Jones’ (Patels?)” or social comparison is a common theme. Families are frequently comparing what the Aunty next door has/did. If you don’t surpass the child next door with your success, then you increase shame/stigma for the family. By dating outside of the culture, you divert from the “conventional path,” therefore moving away from the high achievement expectations of dating/marrying within your caste/culture.

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is a common outcome in South Asian children because of the values discussed before. Children strive to overachieve in all facets of life (personal, professional, physical, emotional). Perfectionism forces people to self-sacrifice for the betterment of the family unit in efforts to obtain approval and appease the family. This may mean sacrificing aspects of your Indian relationship and individual happiness to accommodate the community's wants/needs. This approach leads to burn out, mental exhaustion and at times symptoms of depression and anxiety. If you choose not to accommodate the family's wishes, you move further away from "perfection." This choice to date outside of the culture reflects poorly on the family, highlighting the family's imperfections, which increases stigma.

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Microaggression

“ A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, of unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.”

A common response to Blindian relationships in efforts to offer support. but is really a microaggression:

Although not intended to be harmful, this statement is problematic because:

1. It suggests that dating a black partner is held on a heirarchy and is beneath you
2. You hold subconscious biases in promoting black partnership
3. You choose to avoid the “burden” of tackling anti-black sentiment in your family/household

"We appreciate your bravery/what your inter-racial relationship represents ... But I couldn't disappoint my family that way."

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Internalized Racism

"internalization of racial oppression by the racially subordinated." -Karen D. Pyke

It is the promotion of the white race as superior to other minoritized people of color. This process can be through both conscious or subconscious actions, thoughts, and behaviors. Most individuals, even BIPOC and other POC have internalized racism because of the systems we are indoctrinated into-it is hard/an active process of unlearning to know otherwise.

The Model Minority Myth

The inaccurate notion/stereotype that all Asian Americans are successful, prosperous, and well educated.

The Model Minority Myth is an effort of white supremacy to wedge a divide among people of color. It is a means for white systems to deny racism by pointing to the successes of Asian Americans and ignores the selective privileges afforded to these groups versus BIPOC communities. It also describes Asian Americans as a monolith and minimizes oppression experienced.

Many in South Asian communities believe the model minority myth and aspire to be more proximal to whiteness. These efforts may promote oppression of Black individuals and contribute to community hardships experienced for those in Indian relationships

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SO WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT OUR TRAUMA?

Boundaries

Name the Trauma

Self Assessment

Values Assessment

Self-Care

Communicate with Partner

Build Joy

Trauma Therapy

Build/Find Community

Culturally Competent Care

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CONDUCT A SELF-ASSESSMENT

Do you find yourself on edge, angry, feeling hopeless/helpless, or isolated from the distress? These feelings may suggest that these toxic interactions are having an impact on your well being.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do you feel mostly happy or distressed?
- Do you find yourself living "two lives"?
- Can you be open/yourself in all environments in your life?

NAME THE EXPERIENCE

It's ok to call this what it is-trauma.
There is no shame in giving your experiences a definition/meaning.
Doing so helps the healing process..

Trauma

(traw-muh) noun:

“an intense event that threatens or causes harm to emotional or physical well-being”

TALK WITH YOUR PARTNER

Current events have triggered a trauma response in many Blindian relationships, especially so for Black members of the union. Chances are if you are feeling distressed, so is your partner. Keep the channels of communication open and discuss these feelings often. Become comfortable talking about these experiences in everyday life, after experiences with family, and especially after stressful events..

Trauma

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“an intense event that threatens or causes harm to emotional or physical well-being”

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BUILD YOUR SOCIAL NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Sometimes the Blindian experience forces us to have to build supports outside of our immediate families. Look for communities with shared experiences/interests that can be a place for open/honest discussion and validation of your process.

Trauma

(traw-muh) noun:

“an intense event that threatens or causes harm to emotional or physical well-being”

CONSIDER SEEKING CULTURALLY COMPETENT SUPPORT

Taking the first step in seeking therapy is the bravest and hardest part. Take your time to find someone you feel a connection with. Someone who is a good fit will understand the cultural context that is contributing to your distress.

Trauma

(traw-muh) noun:

“an intense event that threatens or causes harm to emotional or physical well-being”

REQUEST TRAUMA- INFORMED TREATMENT

A trauma-informed perspective will help you build resilience. Treatment will foster skills within yourself while also helping you process the very real experiences you have had in order to bring yourself to a place of healing.

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CONDUCT A VALUES ASSESSMENT

Many times these relationships will cause stressors either for a brief season or a longer period of time. There is no "right" path when it comes to making a decision about what is best for each individual. When placed at the crossroads of deciding which avenue to pursuing negotiating the conflicting demands of individual and family needs, it may be helpful to complete a values assessment. This will help you determine what is more important to you and what your ultimate goals are.

Values Assessment:

A method of listing and exploring values for oneself in efforts to clarify direction and provide motivation for action

VALUES ASSESSMENT

Circle 10 that are most important to you:

- Family
- Friendships
- Independence
- Happiness
- Social Connectivity
- Community
- Achievement
- Stability
- Balance
- Family's Opinion
- Creativity
- Experience
- Work
- Health
- Fun
- Romance
- Partnership
- Leisure
- Respect
- Decision-Making
- Security
- Safety
- Learning/Growth
- Wealth
- Equality
- Self-Expression
- Loyalty
- Kindness

Narrow your 10 chosen to 5:

VALUES ASSESSMENT

Rank Order your 5 most important values:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

At your end of life what do you want to be remembered for? What memories will you hold most dear? Describe:

SET BOUNDARIES FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER

After conducting a values assessment you may determine it is best for you to set boundaries for yourself and your partner. It's okay to put pause on discussing and facing these traumas with family until you have the strength to do so. Repeated toxic stress from these difficult conversations can weather away at our sanity. Learn what that line is for you and prioritize your mental health. This may feel selfish at times because of the notions that have been instilled in us from our communities of origin. Listen to your partner, and know when you both need to step back and regroup. That's OK to do.

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BOUNDARY SETTING

Is the process of setting limits with someone who is causing you harm (physical or emotional) or being disrespectful.

It's hard for many from collectivist cultures to set boundaries with toxic family and relationships because of the *shame* and *guilt* we feel

We're taught to sacrifice our needs for others' wants/desires to maintain the status quo and avoid rocking the boat/causing discomfort for others

But boundary setting is essential for your own health. If you're not safe or in a sane state of mind then you can't give to others as well. Think of the oxygen mask on an airplane analogy. Put your mask on before you help others with their mask. Prioritize your mental health/energies before you help others.

BOUNDARY SETTING

It does NOT make you selfish to prioritize your own needs. You do not have to justify why you need to set the boundaries. And you do not owe it to anyone but yourself to do so. You are worthy of putting yourself first.

As always, consider seeking support from a mental health professional or trusted allies when boundary-setting becomes difficult

We already know how to boundary-set if you've grown up being told:

“Don't stay out too late”

“Don't spend too much”

“Don't eat too much”

BOUNDARY SETTING

Here are some ways to set boundaries:

1. It's ok to ignore phone calls from friends/family if you don't have the energy- send a text at a convenient time for you to check in
2. If in a heated argument, say, "I need to step away from this and take a break. I will get back to you when I'm ready."
3. If family, friends or community members are being overtly abusive and disrespectful it is OK to cut contact with them and step away for your mental health. This disengagement does not have to be permanent, but ask yourself what you would need from them to reestablish communication and be clear about those expectations (i.e. "I need a break from this relationship until you're able to apologize/take accountability for those remarks.")