STATEMENT REGARDING JUNG’S WRITINGS ON
AND THEORIES ABOUT AFRICANS

Elsewhere on this page, you will find an Open Letter signed by analysts and academics that was sent initially to the British Journal of Psychotherapy on the thirtieth anniversary of its publication of an article entitled “Jung: A Racist” by Farhad Dalal, a British psychotherapist. This letter spoke for its signatories but was not an official statement by any formal Jungian organization. It was a call to acknowledge problems in certain of Jung’s writings and to apologize, not for him, but for our own silence in not bringing critical thinking and feeling on these matters to the fore as Jungians teaching about Jung’s work. Though at times Jung ironized and contextualized his remarks more than some of his critics may have recognized, it is essential to us on the Diversity and Inclusivity Committee of the C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco that we not perpetuate stereotypes and assumptions Jung himself passed on without enough critical reflection. We cannot allow institutional racism to survive unnoticed in our midst as we read and teach Jung. We are committed to challenging the cultural basis for Jung’s views whenever we believe that such a challenge may be warranted. These biased views in their own time were closer to the colonialism of Rudyard Kipling and the armchair anthropology of Lucien Levy-Bruhl than to the constructive and creative spirit of the Harlem Renaissance and the best anthropologists of Jung’s own day, including his friend Paul Radin, who criticized Jung’s judgment in this area.

Jung’s race-based remarks about Africans and African Americans, though noticed, have only intermittently and partially been publicly repudiated by Jungian analysts and organizations. There are only four African American Jungian analysts in the United States and two are members of our Institute. This scarcity of participation has prompted the C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco to examine its own failure to disseminate critical knowledge about Jung’s writing and to actively search for examples of how we have perpetuated unconscious systemic racist attitudes, ideas, and practices in our Institute. This continues to be an ongoing group effort. We are working to repair our own failures to address our awareness gap, and are engaged in a dialogue regarding our racial micro-aggressions toward people with African heritage and other people of color. The Institute community has responded by endorsing these efforts in a survey and through participation in initiatives such as the Open Letter, which many have signed and which our community has overwhelmingly supported. The San Francisco Institute is firm in its intention and efforts to address issues of diversity and inclusivity, so that we can provide a community environment of mutual respect and cultural humility, one that is inviting to Africans,
African Americans, people of color, and other subordinated groups. This is now at the heart of the Institute’s mission.

We accept that it is our responsibility to correct theoretical formulations that harm people of color, to apologize for actual discrimination and harm, and to find new ways to keep analytical psychology interacting with communities and colleagues of color. As this Institute is involved in Jungian training, treatment, and scholarship, we commit to increase attention in our programs to in-depth study of clinical, social, and cultural matters that relate to bias, prejudice, diversity, inclusivity, and transcultural and intercultural perspectives in knowledge acquisition and exchange.

To reach these goals will require more active participation in dialogue, reflection, and change within our Jungian communities. We hardly imagine that ours is the last word. We are aware that many who have found problematic passages in Jung prefer to challenge them in a different way than through the Open Letter. We also note that people whose work is cited by signatories to the Open Letter are not always people who did or would have signed the Letter. The bibliography appended to the letter is, nevertheless, a useful index of how some Jungian writers have addressed problems in how race is handled and interpreted psychologically, including in unconscious material such as dreams, in the fostering of multicultural consciousness, and in under-examined layers that may come up in treatment as countertransference and transference projections. We seek conversations with individuals and institutions who are prepared to join in our efforts to critically assess depth psychological attitudes toward people of African descent, and between people of different colors so that 21st century Jungian psychology can be as unbiased as possible.

OPEN LETTER FROM A GROUP OF JUNGIANS ON THE QUESTION OF JUNG’S WRITINGS ON AND THEORIES ABOUT ‘AFRICANS’

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Dear Editor,

Thirty years ago, the British Journal of Psychotherapy published a paper by Dr. Farhad Dalal entitled ‘Jung: A Racist’ (Dalal, 1988). Regrettably, no adequate acknowledgement or apology for what Jung wrote, and Dalal critiqued, has been forthcoming from the field of analytical psychology and Jungian analysis. (To contextualize what follows, the Abstract to Dalal’s paper has been placed in an Appendix to this letter.)

We write now as a group of individuals - Jungian analysts, clinicians, and academics utilizing concepts from analytical psychology – to end the silence.
Via detailed scholarship, Dalal sets out what Jung wrote about persons of African and South Asian Indian heritage, as well as other populations of colour, and Indigenous peoples. Before and since the paper, Jung’s views have caused considerable disquiet and often anger. These are the reactions of the communities concerned, but they also exist in clinical, academic and cultural circles generally. Analytical psychologists and other Jungians have known about the implications of Jung’s ideas for decades; there are signatories to this Letter that have campaigned for recognition of the problems. But there has been a failure to address them responsibly, seriously and in public.

We share the concern that Jung’s colonial and racist ideas – sometimes explicit and sometimes implied – have led to inner harm (for example, internalized inferiority and self-abnegation) and outer harm (such as interpersonal and social consequences) for the groups, communities and individuals mentioned in the previous paragraph. Moreover, these ideas have also led to aspects of de facto institutional and structural racism being present in Jungian organizations.

The intellectual and cultural environment of late 19th and early 20th century psychology promoted many colonial and racist attitudes. Jung’s largely uncritical embrace of these attitudes led him to conclude that he was justified in constructing a hierarchy in which people of African heritage were alleged to ‘lack a layer’ of ‘mind’ that white Europeans possessed, and thus were ‘primitive’ in their emotional and psychological functioning. In addition, he also failed to listen to warnings from within his circle that his views were problematic.

We doubt that any contemporary clinicians and academics in the Jungian and post-Jungian community would endorse these ideas now, but the absence of an open distancing from Jung on these questions has allowed for some implicit biases in Jung’s work to remain perpetuated: unexamined and unchallenged. For example, the use of skin colour as symbolic of both ‘race’ and certain psychological traits. Failure to acknowledge and apologize for these offensive attitudes, and their potential harm and confusion, is also not in keeping with the spirit and ethos of people who, like us, currently participate in Jungian and post-Jungian communities that support and value diversity, gender equality, social justice, political activism, and respect for differences in populations, cultures, religions, and sexual orientations.

We want, moreover, to recruit more students, clinicians and scholars of colour to study, train, conduct research, and contribute to analytical psychology, developing and actualizing a more refined attitude towards human differences than what we have inherited, or may now have.
And so, our statements here are not so much to chastise Jung as to take responsibility ourselves for the harm that has ensued in these thirty years in which little has been done to rectify Jung’s errors.

We deeply regret our role in having taken so long to issue a statement like this. We realize that it has been extremely difficult for persons of African descent, and other populations that have been similarly maligned, to contemplate entering either Jungian training and treatment, or becoming a Jungian analyst. Whilst it is true that people of colour are underrepresented in the psychotherapies generally, the social data suggest that, where comparisons can and have been made, the problem is even more marked within the Jungian clinical communities.

In light of this, we call on all involved in analytical psychology, including ourselves, to accept and insist on new obligations: to accept responsibility for correcting and changing theories that harm people of colour, to apologize for actual harm and discrimination, and to find new ways to keep analytical psychology engaged with communities and colleagues of colour. We call on all involved in Jungian training, treatment and scholarship, to increase attention in their programmes to in-depth study of clinical, social and cultural matters that relate to bias, prejudice, diversity, and transcultural or intercultural perspectives and knowledge.

We recognize that, collectively, to reach these goals will require engagement in dialogue, reflection, and change within our Jungian communities. We hope our colleagues, throughout the Jungian world, recognize and welcome our good intentions. We also seek conversations with individuals and institutions who are prepared to assist us in our efforts to make the changes that are now necessary.

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APPENDIX – ABSTRACT OF DALAL (1988)

The paper examines Jung’s perception of the non-European. It is argued that his perception of black people is racist and that these same views permeate the entire fabric of Jung’s psychological theory. Further, that these views are woven into the theoretical foundations of two major Jungian concepts: the Collective Unconscious and Individuation. Finally, the paper examines the consequences of these theories as perceived by Jung, in terms of the possibilities or otherwise of people of different races living together.

REFERENCE

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


