

THERAPY FOR MGBÁNWÉ

[TRANSFORMATION]

A Nigerian Diaspora Man's
Mental Health Journey and Tips



ONYEDIKACHUKWU T. MBA

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Therapy for Mgbánwè [T R A N S F O R M A T I O N]

A Nigerian Diaspora Man's Mental
Health Journey and Tips

ONYEDIKACHUKWU T. MBA

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Therapy for Mgbánwè [Transformation]
Second Edition

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DEDICATION

To the men and women who have, in one way or another, been exposed to abuse—whether in the past or present, directly or indirectly—this book is for you. May it offer you hope, strength, and the understanding that healing is possible. You are seen, you are heard, and you are not alone.

FOREWORD

Words from Dr. Suzy S Sartain, MS, LPC

Why Would I Attend Therapy?

Congratulations to whomever is curious enough to pick up a booklet about therapy for men, written by a man, Dika, who used therapy to not only heal but also propel himself forward.

If any of us were to break our arm, it's off to the Emergency Room—no questions asked. Our trust in the film that holds the image of our broken bone is the fuel for casting the bone until it heals. The itchy, uncomfortable experience for six weeks or so eventually ends when the cast is taken off, and we feel relieved. The white, pale skin feels so free again. Old experiences, as

simple as feeling the breeze on our skin, leave us with the deceptive sense of Nirvana that we are healed. Oh no. Then comes physical therapy (PT). The arm must be exercised with the supervision of a well-trained physical therapist. Every day, for six weeks, we do the prescribed exercises, checking in once a week for new routines to strengthen the arm. After what seems like a decade of weekly meetings, we are sent home with a clean bill of health. Insurance covered it all.

However, we are left with a scarred arm. We feel pain if we sleep on it the wrong way or if we sit in a position that used to be comfortable. But lo and behold, this was our remote-control hand, and pushing the buttons to change TV channels, texting, or even getting dressed in the morning can be painful. The pain seems to fade over time, but not completely. At some point, we need to accept the arm and its residual pain which may

require a few more PT sessions. Healing is ongoing.

When we find ourselves in a dark place, feeling compulsive about our behaviors, fearing the unknown, or losing our spouse or job, we often don't know where to turn. Flashbacks from traumatic experiences and spiritual battles can confuse us, leading us to mask the pain with alcohol, drugs, or other addictive behaviors.

The stigma surrounding mental health leaves our pain invisible and untouched, forever eating away at our souls. We ignore counseling, still fearing the unknown because counseling is for those who “really need it.”

This book serves as a roadmap for what we hope will be a life-saving experience. Counseling is a partnering experience between the client and the therapist/counselor. One brings their problems to the table and the other brings tools for healing. The client must believe that

counseling will help, while the therapist believes the tools (which are takeaways for life) will be beneficial.

Mr. Dika and I met through a counseling agency assignment. His problems were layered like a freshly harvested onion—hard to separate, juicy, and stinging to the eyes—parallel to the tools I offered should he choose to use them.

We both had hope for healing. One week at a time, one tool at a time, one success at a time, we worked together, empowering Dika to move forward, and be happy and healthy. By giving attention to life's challenges, putting deposits in emotional bank accounts, and living life on life's terms, we created a healthy composite of hope.

Picking up this book is a good first step. We expect that whether you are male or female, you will be encouraged to treat your mental health as you would a broken arm. You would GET HELP.

ABSTRACT

Growing up in Nigeria in the early 80s and 90s, many of us were raised with a strong emphasis on religion, often neglecting our psychological and emotional well-being. Consequently, mental health remains a rather taboo and awkward topic for us to discuss.

I was born on Wednesday, October 28, 1981, in Enugu, Nigeria, as the fifth child to clergy parents, but I was raised across different regions of Nigeria, which shaped me as a third-culture individual. Being third-culture means having been exposed to and influenced by multiple cultures, allowing me to integrate diverse perspectives and experiences. As a young adult moving from city to city, in hindsight, there was a significant lack of mental health awareness throughout the country.

Like many Nigerians, I was raised in a loving but sometimes dysfunctional family. My parents occasionally displayed emotional dysregulation, becoming verbally aggressive when frustrated. My mom, in particular, was emotionally impulsive and quick to discipline us physically, while my dad had a more structured approach to corporal punishment. Despite our strong religious upbringing, we had no understanding of mental health.

As a result, my siblings and I either emulated our parents' behaviors or were drawn to people with similar traits, normalizing these harmful patterns. This is a phenomenon known as sexual imprinting.^[12] Emotional dysregulation became the norm for me. Although I was not known for being emotionally impulsive, I accepted such behaviors because I was expected to "be a man" and tolerate them.

Fast forward to Saturday, January 9, 2016. I was living in Abuja, Nigeria, when I connected with someone on the Tinder dating app. This connection would eventually change the trajectory of my life for the worse. For privacy, let's call this person Jane.

Our Tinder chat that night was filled with great vibes, and soon after, Jane sent me her WhatsApp contact details. We continued our conversation on WhatsApp, and everything seemed to flow smoothly—at least, so I thought. For brevity, I will summarize my experience with Jane here, but I will document the full story in another book titled ***3 Years a Slave***.

Jane had visited Nigeria for the Christmas holiday and returned to the United States shortly after. We reconnected for about a month, during which I endured her emotional outbursts, having normalized such behavior from key women in my formative years. However, my

self-preservation instincts eventually kicked in, and I cut ties with Jane before the end of February 2016.

By June 2016, she reconnected with me on Facebook, apologizing for her past behavior and suggesting that maybe God intended for us to be together. I naively fell for it. Despite many ups and downs and clear signs of abuse, I arrived in the United States on July 20, 2017, on a K1-Fiance visa to be with Jane. To justify staying in the abusive relationship, I consoled myself with religious beliefs about love and perseverance, believing there was nothing wrong with suffering long in the name of love.

On February 10, 2018, after months of periodic abuse, Jane escalated to physical violence. It was then that I started coming to my senses. I quickly removed myself from the situation and sought refuge in a secure space, reflecting on my life. I

finally decided to contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH).

Although the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services had provided information on the rights of immigrant victims of domestic violence when my K1-visa was approved in Nigeria, I had only glanced through it and lacked the courage to act. However, after nearly seven months, I finally reached out to NDVH, which was one of the best decisions I ever made. The agents provided crucial information on abuse and the power control wheel, setting my life on a new, positive trajectory.

Despite this, the abuse continued and even worsened when Jane discovered my contact with NDVH. In April 2018, I confided in my supervisor at work, who informed me about the company's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Through the EAP, I found a psychotherapist, Dr. Suzy Sartain (Dr. S), who transformed my life.

On July 24, 2018, I had my first-ever video psychoanalysis and psychotherapy session with Dr. S, marking the beginning of a new chapter. Therapy with her paved the way for my journey to self-awareness, self-realization, personal responsibility, accountability, self-preservation, and overall improvements in my mental and emotional health.

Regardless of your gender or relationship type, ^[5] the simple tips documented in this book are designed to help you achieve mental well-being and improve your emotional intelligence.

PREFACE

The journey to understanding and prioritizing mental health is one that is often laden with misconceptions, fear, and resistance—especially for those of us raised in cultures where therapy is seen as unnecessary or even taboo. As a Nigerian man living in the diaspora, I've experienced, firsthand, the reluctance to engage with mental health services, despite the internal struggles I faced. It took time, courage, and, most importantly, the decision to prioritize my well-being before I could fully embrace the benefits of therapy.

Therapy for Mgbánwè was born out of my own journey—a journey filled with realizations, growth, and healing. This book is not just a reflection of my experiences but also a practical guide for anyone navigating similar challenges. Whether you're new to therapy or have yet to

take that first step, this book is here to demystify the process, share the lessons I've learned, and offer tips that can help you along your path.

I've written this book for individuals who may feel disconnected from or unsure about the mental health system. But it is also for those who have lived through experiences of trauma and abuse, both past and present. These experiences can weigh heavily on our mental and emotional health, and therapy can be a crucial tool in helping us heal, grow, and reclaim our lives. It also contains practical tips to help the reader unlearn and relearn.

In this book, I share my personal stories, practical advice, and mental health tips with the hope that they will resonate with others. My goal is to make therapy more accessible and relatable, and to provide a resource for those who might feel unsure or skeptical about seeking professional help.

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I invite you to read this with an open mind and heart. Remember, your mental health is just as important as your physical health and spirituality, and seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness. I hope this book helps you in some way—whether it gives you the courage to start therapy, offers new perspectives, helps you navigate your current situation, or simply reassures you that you’re not alone on this journey.

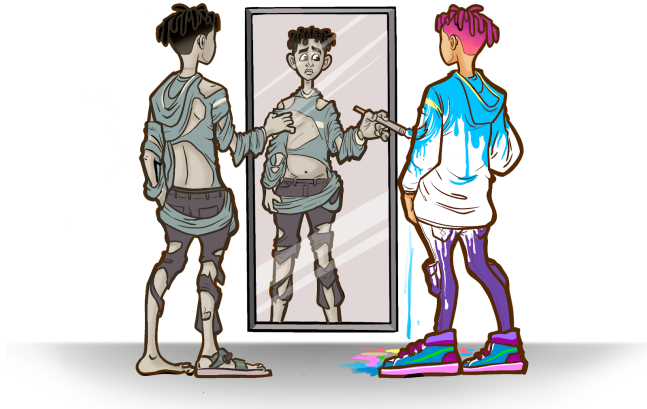
Sincerely,

Onyedikachukwu T.C.E. Mba

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INTRODUCTION & RATIONALE



The concept of "**Mgbanwe**," meaning "**Change**" or "**Transformation**," originates from the culture of both my parents—the Igbo culture of Nigeria. It reflects a worldview that views change, not as an interruption, but as a crucial and constructive force in life. In Igbo philosophy, "**Mgbanwe**" emphasizes the...[buy book to continue reading](#)

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