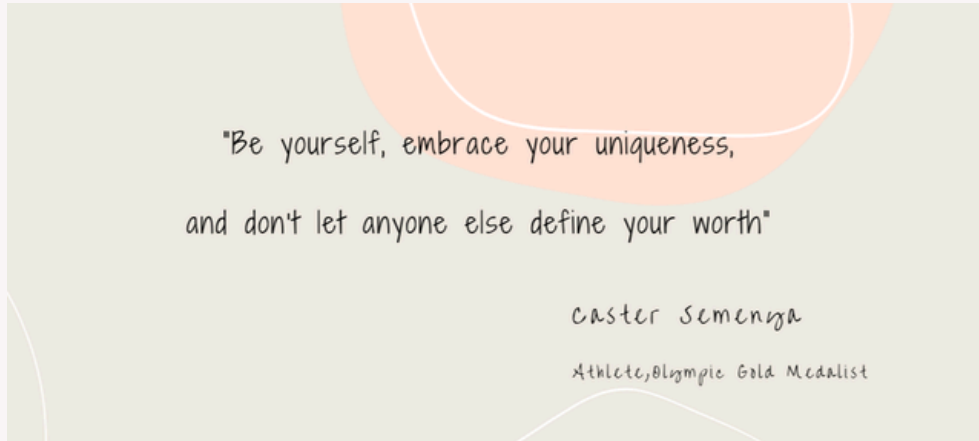


THE INTERSECTION

AN EYEZWE CONSULTING NEWSLETTER & PODCAST



Series: Why Black Women in Corporate South Africa Fear Visibility – And How We Change It

Post 2: Stereotypes That Silence

"Too aggressive." "Not leadership material." Why do Black women's strengths get weaponized against them? These stereotypes don't just sting—they keep talent hidden.

The "Angry Black Woman" Trope

I once attended a Personal Branding workshop hosted by the BMF and facilitated by my brilliant friend, Bongzi Bako of AdBoss Media Group. During a break, a participant shared her story with me. She had spoken up at work, only to be punished, isolated, and eventually lose her job. Ironically, her company's core value was "speak without fear."

Her story is not unique. Many Black women have suffered consequences for simply asking for what they need, pointing out injustice, or offering new ideas. Instead of being recognised as courageous contributors, they are often accused of being "too aggressive," "angry," or "loud."

This constant hyper-vigilance shapes our responses. We brace for attacks before they come. And yes, sometimes we sound defensive—because we are protecting ourselves. Brené Brown says, "Clear is kind, unclear is unkind." Perhaps when we are told, "You don't need to be angry," the better response isn't "I'm not angry" (which ironically sounds angry), but: "How could I say that in a way that doesn't sound angry to you?"

This simple shift moves the burden of proof away from us and challenges the other person to reflect on their perception. Still, organisations carry a responsibility: to build cultures of psychological safety. But as Black women, embracing inner safety first—before extending it to others—helps us show up with more calm, clarity, and courage.

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Microaggressions: Compliments That Cut
Most Black women know the sting of backhanded compliments:

- “You’re so articulate!”
- “Where did you go to school? Your English is so good.”
- “Wow, how can you afford that car?”

At face value, these comments may seem harmless. But when you hear them day after day, your spirit knows better. They reduce your identity to novelty, as if intelligence or success were unexpected.

The result? You either shrink and hide—or rebel loudly. Either way, you lose. Because microaggressions are designed to undermine, not uplift. And over time, their cumulative effect silences even the boldest voices.

A Word to My Sisters

To my fellow Black women: the battle has already been won. You are exactly where you are meant to be. You belong.

Don’t let stereotypes or silence dictate when it’s time to leave. You will know when you’ve learned what you need for your next season. Until then, trust and believe that you are fully equipped.

The Bottom Line

Stereotypes like the Angry Black Woman, the microaggressions disguised as compliments, and the burden of being the Strong Black Woman are more than labels—they are silencing tools. Breaking them begins with organisations creating safety, and with us grounding ourselves in self-trust.

The "Strong Black Woman" Burden
Perhaps the most damaging stereotype is the expectation to always be strong. For generations, Black women have been celebrated for endurance: to push through hardship, disappointment, and exhaustion. In the workplace, this looks like being the fixer—the one handed the boring tasks, the crisis projects, the invisible labour no one else wants.

The tragedy is that this expectation doesn’t come only from white colleagues—it also comes from within our own communities, including Black men. Double jeopardy, sometimes even triple.

I remember working as a quality control chemist early in my career. Collecting truck samples was gruelling, and when a colleague offered to help, I explained why it mattered. His response? “Oh, usucabanga ukuthi unguMlungu?” (“Oh, so now you think you’re white?”). Anyone who has worked in a laboratory you will understand the importance of proper sampling. As a black man, he felt I was ordering him around. A woman telling him what to do and how to do it - it did not land well. I get it. It is the separation of work and gender that gets problematic in the workplace.

Being vocal, asking for help, or requesting resources often comes at a cost: rejection, shame, or accusations of weakness. But here’s the truth—strength is not about burning yourself out. It is about knowing when to ask, when to rest, and when to choose yourself.

Next in the series: Why representation at the top matters.