Proposal to include race, culture and diversity in Counselling Psychology training
Black and Asian Counselling Psychologists’ Group (BACPG)
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Foreword

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We all have a unique combination of a psycho-cultural and racial context. However, in our Counselling Psychology theoretical texts, research studies and clinical work, this has often not been acknowledged. If we relate to a person without their psychosocial context we may see something quite different and miss something significant. We won’t see the whole, only some parts.

We can no longer ignore today’s multicultural and multiracial world and the richness it brings as well as the difficult issues and challenges it poses both outside and inside the consulting room. The time has come to take these issues seriously and therefore it is recommended in this document that a formal module be introduced on every Counselling Psychology course, which runs through the length and breadth of training.

The aim of this module would be to address the concepts of ‘race’, culture and ethnicity and understand their complexity. “It is a way of helping us to become sensitive to the differences and the importance of the social context, cultural and racial roots, and, subsequently, the formation of our complex and ever changing psycho-racial identity” (pg. xx, Eleftheriadou, 2010). With and through this aim, we have the opportunity of contextualising our clients, in terms of their values, beliefs, behaviour and thinking. In turn, this is a way of appreciating the impact of emotionally powerful experiences such as racism, the migration process, exile or what it means to become a refugee.

A formal module would give adequate time for students to understand how racial and cultural issues impact on our lives, how they manifest between colleagues and of course most significantly how they emerge in the clinical setting. It is vital to stress that these issues apply to us all, not only our clients or research participants. At the same time, we need a good balance of addressing the issues and feeling comfortable in doing so, without overestimating or underestimating them. This can only occur when adequate thinking and discussion is allocated to them.

We need to find creative ways that psychologists can engage with these issues, on an intellectual and emotional level. Both of these levels are necessary if we are to really challenge our ways of thinking and broaden our horizons. In turn, I hope we can enable our colleagues and clients to raise these issues, however difficult they might be. What is
promoted is the idea of exploring rather than making assumptions, finding out what meanings ‘race’, culture and diversity have for each of our clients and/or research participants.

In the spirit of Counselling Psychology, I hope that we can be open to theoretical pluralism, international research findings and take into account what we are privy to in the consulting room. I, therefore, fully support Dr Yetunde Ade-Serrano and Dr Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena’s recommendation that each training course offers a module in 'race', culture and diversity work.

**Scope**

Awareness of race, culture and diversity is a fundamental element of good professional practice and an imperative segment of training. Thus, in this paper, the aim is to provide a rationale for widening the scope of Counselling Psychology training to explicitly include and embrace the values of race, culture and diversity as well as acknowledging its impact.

The paper’s recommendations in so much as it pertains to the privileges (or lack of) of both the practitioner and client, addresses, challenges and explores perspectives of theory, practice and research within the field of Counselling Psychology. This will complement the existing principles outlined in the BPS document “Our Plan for Equality and Diversity” (2008), the revised syllabus requiring cultural competency, as well as the HCPC standards of education, training and proficiency. Thus, placing Counselling Psychologists and the profession on a more equal footing with our local and international counterparts with regards to incorporating these important areas into the training of Counselling Psychologists. Additionally, it will highlight the existing knowledge and expertise held within the UK.

**Background and Rationale**

In a recent document (CDEM, 2013) outlining its commitment to a culture and diversity strategy, the division of Counselling Psychology states that its purpose for the development of such a strategy is to “record our intentions which are consonant with the core values of the Division”. This includes but is not limited to tenets such as inclusivity, respecting diversity and difference, and challenging Eurocentric/Western values as an unquestioned given.

The explicit action-objectives of the strategy propose to incorporate and promote learning related to culture and diversity, and within this, race, ethnicity and difference. In particular, it emphasises the below tasks:

- Ensuring that ‘culture and diversity within and across ethnic minorities’ concerns are ‘mainstream’ not just within the divisional committee but within regions and networking and interest groups within Counselling Psychology.
- Encouraging investment in CDEM education in our training courses, and in training syllabi.
- Emboldening a critical examination of different theoretical stances.
- Fostering appropriate supervision in relation to culture and diversity, race and ethnicity.
- Facilitating practice-applicable and externally focused research, publication and debate.

Whilst the CDEM document is timely, Counselling Psychologists have always existed in communities that are diverse in culture and racial makeup. As practitioners working within these contexts, it is inevitable that we will systematically encounter individuals who hold multiple identities. Ethically, we have a responsibility to engage in learning and dialogue that is representative of such diversity.

Wide scopes of people seek to, and access different modes of therapeutic interventions. Some individuals from ethnic minority groups are however less likely to access therapy. This may be partially due to the stigma of therapy, the perceived betrayal of family or cultural loyalties, and in particular belief or prejudice, and at times experience that professionals seemingly are not well equipped to engage with or understand client experiences (Holt Garner, 2006). Research suggests that individuals from BME groups may be more likely to be referred to psychiatric services and misdiagnosed, rather than have the opportunity to access appropriate counselling or psychotherapy relevant to their needs (Fernando, 2003).

Race and culture is relevant to all points of the life span and they both interact with other identity components, contexts and settings. As such, race and culture should be considered in the teaching and training of all therapeutic frameworks, particularly when approaches tend to be Euro and/or Western centric and do not necessarily take into consideration the diversity of the clients we see and engage with (Woolfe, Dryden and Strawbridge, 2003).

Furthermore, research in the areas of race, culture and diversity, and particularly in relation to the field of Counselling Psychology, tends to be more internationally based. There is of course room to extensively develop this in the UK, despite the seemingly “silent” status we attach to this area. Counselling Psychology can become much more involved through the encouragement and support of exploration of themes emergent from race, culture and diversity from the client, therapist, supervisee, supervisor etc. perspectives.

It has become evident when viewing submissions of research that some courses do support the examination of themes related to race, culture, and diversity. It would be extremely helpful and bold if this becomes the template for all training institutions. Further, our knowledge would be far more enhanced if such research becomes widely available to others within the field and indeed the wider community as a whole.

Since BACPG has become more heavily involved in raising awareness of issues around race, culture and diversity, some courses offering Counselling Psychology training have incorporated the exploration and learning of such themes on their syllabi. Up until now this has been limited to a single day workshop at a specific point in the training. Further, these
workshops are often presented as non-compulsory. We advocate for an on-going, continuous exploration of these issues, which ought to be implemented at each stage of the training programme. One aspect of delivery highlighted by a recent feedback from trainees (Ade-Serrano and Nkansa-Dwamena, 2015) suggested that the professionals delivering these courses ought to be representative of the communities, ethnicities, and diversities they are trying to raise awareness about.

Psychologists, students (and other professionals) from ethnically diverse backgrounds have commented that training does not complement their experiences or speak to their identities as individuals (Ellis and Cooper, 2013). It is important then that Counselling Psychology training (amongst other factors) reflects the experiences of all individuals particularly those from Black Minority Ethnic backgrounds and the reality of the multi-cultural and multi-social society in which we exist. A lack of this incorporation can have wide and far-reaching consequences, including but not limited to:

1. Counselling Psychologists from BME backgrounds being alienated. This will continue to foster the perception that our professional body is not fully representative of the communities we serve
2. The risk of fragmenting and/or re-traumatising clients because of a lack of knowledge, awareness and clinical experience
3. Clients disengaging or terminating therapy due to therapist’s lack of courage or knowledge to explore underlying issues pertinent to the process.
4. Ill equipped professionals who are unable to deal with the dynamics of difference
5. Personal and professional ignorance of practitioners’ own identity construction, and position of privilege
6. A dearth of information that would have otherwise informed the Counselling Psychology practice.

As Counselling Psychologists, our work intertwines and intersects with different groups and individual(s). Clarkson and Nippoda (1997) suggest “we consider it impossible to conduct Counselling Psychology or any of its related activities out of context. That means that all therapeutic activities inevitably and inextricably occur within the idiom and the atmosphere, the climate and the background of the cultures that impinge on it. These 'cultures' or what are called 'structures of feeling' can be related to gender, religion, organisation, profession, sexual orientation, class, nationality, country of origin, parts of the country of ancestral origin, language and so on” (pg. 415). These are essential aspects that need to be taken into consideration, as we all need a sense of belonging to one or multiple cultures, which may hold different meaning and importance at different points of the life span. There is a need for this to be considered in Counselling Psychology work.

The importance of providing therapy and making it accessible to all communities is a growing discussion within the psychology field, and whilst some organisations strive to meet this need, the training in areas of race, culture and diversity is sadly given less importance on Counselling Psychology courses.
In comparison to international psychology courses (e.g. see APA guidelines and principles for accreditation of professional psychology programmes), Counselling Psychology training in the UK is lagging behind with regards to incorporating the ideas embedded with race, culture and diversity into syllabus and clinical practice development. There are several reasons why general inclusion of this area within the theoretical, clinical and research elements of the Counselling Psychology training is imperative.

1. Individual self-development and awareness is at the heart of Counselling Psychology and its training. It is an on-going growth process. It should sync our exploration of our ideals, values, ideas and understanding on issues related to race and culture (our own and others) and form an integral part of our practice in a rich and meaningful way.

2. Counselling Psychology’s growth and development sits within a socio-historical context and diverse environment. As such, thinking and experience regarding race and culture intersects with various facets under the umbrella of psychology. This includes theoretical models, therapeutic frameworks, research agendas and practice. The concept of a culture-free Counselling Psychology is as improbable as a value-free or neutral Counselling Psychology (Newnes, 1996).

3. Counselling Psychology holds within its ethos the importance of engaging with individual(s) from all walks of life, gleaned from the premise that the work we do is and should not only be available to a homogenous group of people. To practice in a way that demonstrates this premise, practitioners need to be able to not just be aware of, but also immerse themselves in the dialogue, narrative and thinking of the diverse group of people with whom we purport to engage.

4. To reach an in-depth level that enables for an honest and open discussion about race, ethnicity and culture in the therapy session, and indeed within the field, Counselling Psychologists require the space to confront and explore their own biases, assumptions and positions of privilege and power.

As summarised above, self-awareness, self-development, intersectionality, understanding positions of privilege and power as it pertains to race, culture and diversity are only some of the necessary areas that ought to be challenged and worked with through critical exploration within our training and profession. These issues deserve a lot more attention and validation.

**Recommendations**

Modules at each stage of the training should be implemented, grasping the essence of the suggested areas below:

*Theory*
Assessed training and workshops on issues that emerge from or are a consequence of race, culture and diversity:

- Considering the position and development of self in relation to race, culture and diversity
- Conducting research with diverse client groups
- Race, culture, diversity and supervision
- Assessment, formulation and therapeutic skills when working with related culture and diversity issues
- Consideration of inter-generational aspects of race, culture and identity
- Difference and sameness within the context of race, culture, diversity and identity
- Considering race and culture in systemic work
- Race and culture within different therapeutic frameworks:
  - Considering diverse cultural frameworks
  - Other therapeutic interventions with diverse client groups (e.g. tree of life, Ncube, 2006)
  - Using a uni-modal approach, considering community, cultural formulation and approaches
- Multiple identities: considering race and culture in relation to other aspects of identity including age, gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability.
- Ethics, ethical frameworks and the intersection with race and culture
- Consideration and exploration of theories and epistemologies stemming from different cultural standpoints, with an emphasis on theories from BME backgrounds, as these tend to be less explored or acknowledged within psychological literature and practice.

Research

As in any field, research is an important tool for developing and promoting evidence-based practice, and for developing a narrative of the experiences of individuals from many different walks of life. In order to promote research on themes/areas related to race, culture and identity, we would suggest:

- The division and Counselling Psychology courses establish a database that holds all research (past and present) specifically related to race and culture so as to promote dialogue and cross working, but also to help identify gaps within current research
- Counselling Psychology courses increase links with departments, disciplines, and professionals, and across their respective institutions that have expertise and interest in conducting research within this area.
- Encourage forums where research stemming from this area can be discussed and explored. This can help to promote the different types of research, but also help to facilitate new ideas and increase exploration regarding themes from areas which are often under-researched or under-represented
- Raise awareness amongst course staff and supervisors about the need for research pertaining to areas of race and culture, and contribution Counselling Psychology can
bring to this. In addition to this, ensure that course staff and research supervisors encourage, advice and support students who are interested in carrying out research in this area.

- Incorporate learning within the course that examines the different ways to research topics in relation to this area, encouraging creativity and novel ethical practice. Furthermore, exploration of the challenges that arise in researching this area, including reflexivity, epistemology, recruitment, gaining ethical approval, consent, data protection and confidentiality.
- Examination of the consequences and subsequent narrative resulting from these issues as well as the impact of research on individuals and communities

Professional Practice
Practice and placements form and represent an important learning avenue for all trainees and professionals. In these settings, the application of theory and evidence-based practice contributes to the development and confidence of practitioners. In highlighting the importance of race, culture and diversity within this process and learning, we suggest:

- Trainees be encouraged to engage with at least one placement over the course of their training in which they engage with clients from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds
- Monitoring and provision of culturally appropriate supervision both within and outside of the training course
- There is undeniable value in having supervisors from different cultures and racial backgrounds enabling a critical appraisal of the trainee’s development in the area of sameness and difference
- Courses should establish links with placements offering support and therapeutic engagement with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities
- Trainees should be encouraged to demonstrate their learning and development in engaging in such placements through dialogue and assessment

The above is by no means an exhaustive list of recommendations. It is important that as with all aspects of Counselling Psychology training, learning in this area is regularly reviewed to keep abreast of new findings and emerging narratives.

The inclusion of a race, culture and diversity component within Counselling Psychology training and profession also considers its intersectionality. It is about our wider population as a whole and the many races, cultures and sub-cultures that exist within it. The notion of culture encompasses all, it forms part of our core narrative as individuals and communities. Collaboration is one of the keys to understanding race, culture and diversity. It is by this means we can continue to unravel essential components of our identities such as principles, values, life experiences, meaning-making processes, attachment, and beliefs in so much as it relates to our personal development as well as our therapeutic relationships, assessment of and interventions with our clients.
References


