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Introduction

This book is the product of a study I undertook in 2005. In this study, counsellors who had trained over the previous two decades on a variety of courses reported that they had not experienced a space to contemplate, or received sufficient input to support, the experiences of black people, in either training or counselling settings. To address these issues, the study placed counsellor training in higher education under the spotlight.

Discussions with trainees showed that concerns about racism featured highly in their interactions and needed to be worked through. Trainees were clearly asking how one makes the therapeutic space safe enough for a dialogue about racism.

As chapter 1 shows, my research demonstrated that themes such as fear and safety were features of the trainees' process of exploring and understanding black issues. Four concepts that evolved from the study – shared concerns, finding a voice, recognition trauma and a bridge from fear to transformation – are therefore used as useful partitions in this book. These partitions represent different phases of the self-development process of understanding black issues. The study showed that sharing concerns assisted trainees to find a voice where previously they felt silenced. Their narrative demonstrated that they were keen to open up a dialogue about black issues but needed safety to unravel the sticky and often emotional impact of racism. Concern was displayed in different ways by black and white trainees. White trainees expressed a fear of losing their assumed power in the unconscious schema of institutional racism. Black trainees experienced fears associated with their emancipation from the role of the oppressed. I have named the processing of these fears and feelings for both black and white trainees 'recognition trauma', because this term gives meaning to the emotional process of exploring black issues. In her study of racial oppression in workplace contexts, Alleyne (2005) mentions a process akin to recognition trauma:

Deep scrutiny and analysis of my findings, coupled with observable evidence from private practice, suggested there was an influential internal force that co-existed alongside external and interpersonal

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experiences of oppression. I see this significant outcome as having particular relevance to black people as a whole and for all therapists who work with black identity wounding and other issues of cultural trauma. (p. 293)

Trainees' feelings about racism, guilt, history and trust needed to be processed to form a bridge that would enable their progress from fear to transformation.

A previous study by Lawrence (2003) surveyed counselling students about race and cultural issues during their training. The survey highlighted that white students felt more comfortable on their training than their black counterparts. All students felt that the race and culture of their tutor would affect their training experience. Respondents were consistently saying that 'there was a gap in what could be an opportunity to work through the diversity of race and culture within their counselling training' (p. 123).

This book contributes to ways of filling gaps identified in Eurocentric approaches to counselling and therapy training. It supports the dynamics of change, widening participation and diversity, rather than assuming that Eurocentric theory, more relevant to white middle-class individuals, can be applied systematically. The main concepts in the study are presented along with proposals to support the training and continuing professional development of counsellors in their work with individuals and groups in the caring professions. This book offers a response to some of the questions and concerns raised by trainee counsellors. It is written in an integrative, transcultural style that reflects my approach to counsellor training.

What Are Black Issues?

The first challenge that reflected the nature of this question was raised by trainees' demand to define the term 'black'. 'Black' is a political and sociological term, identifying a group of people who have been most vulnerable to the oppression of white racism owing to difference in skin colour. As the most visible minority, this group has been least represented in the field of psychotherapy and counselling. However, it must be noted that individuals from African and Asian backgrounds who have experienced racism may not all subscribe to the label 'black'.

Black people of African and Caribbean heritage are six times more likely to be sectioned under the United Kingdom's Mental Health Act than white people. Asian people are four times more likely to commit suicide than white people (Foundation News, 2003). These facts demand greater emphasis on psychotherapy and counselling provision that not only takes account of, but also works with, black issues to increase resources for those at risk of entering the mental health system or committing suicide. To support this effort, this book focuses primarily on people of African and Caribbean heritage. However, the themes and discussions can be used as a model for work with other minority group experiences.

As opposed to a focus on black people per se, the word 'issues' has been linked to the concept of 'black'. The term 'black issues' was placed at the centre of the study and included in workshops so that responses to it could be examined. The approach was intended to be emancipatory so as to broaden understanding of the experiences of both black and white trainees in relation to black issues. 'Issues' in this context therefore refers to any concern, problem, dynamic, feeling or experience raised about black people, by themselves or by white people. Using a broad definition of the term allows for the relationships, personal development and theoretical context of experiences to be taken into account. Conclusions drawn from my experience as a counsellor trainer suggest that unless black issues are raised in the context of racism, general experiences pertaining to culture or everyday life are likely to be raised mainly by black people themselves. This often causes the training group to become overwhelmed with powerful feelings related to racism. I have known this scenario to occur when training approaches do not facilitate listening skills that appropriately reflect black issues or explore the impact of racism.

The Need for Change

As diversity in the student population increases, the demand to provide services for the wider, multicultural population grows. This requires training to address the dynamics of racism and the experiences of black people.

The Race Relations Act 1976 (Amended 2000) now gives public authorities, including higher education authorities, a 'statutory general duty to promote race equality' (CRE, 2002). Developments in social policy

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are necessary for creating frameworks to address power structures that maintain marginalised voices. The Race Relations Act does not use the term 'black issues', but it does apply regulations to race issues (equal rights and access, regardless of colour or creed) that my study indicated were a significant area of black issues. The Act suggests that as a community of practitioners 'we' are responsible for change in the educational process. In view of this responsibility, counsellors/therapists can be empowered to discover the voice of change within their training experience. This book proposes ways of understanding black issues and ways to develop practice that challenges an over-reliance on Eurocentric approaches, as defined in the following quotation:

Psychology as an organised discipline, as taught and practised, ascribes little value to the experiences of black people. They are important only in so much as they reinforce white people's sense of superiority. Out and out eurocentricism permeates assumptions, outlook and instruments of psychology. But it is this psychology that has stormed through the world to be adopted even by black nations, uncritically and wholesale. (Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994, p. 127)

In keeping with this statement, this book encourages readers to extend their therapeutic repertoire and address biases that encroach on black self-pride and cultural identity.

A Model of Integrating Black Issues into Counsellor Training

During the study, I was compelled to check my own 'colour blindness' as a black woman. Working within a white middle-class counsellor training framework, I questioned how engaged I was in a dialogue about black issues with colleagues and trainees. Some trainees questioned my right as a black tutor to challenge Eurocentric paradigms within education, and others viewed the inclusion of black issues as an additional problem for them to solve. As a tutor I needed to develop my compassion towards individuals who expressed negative responses. This approach provided a supportive model for counselling trainees.

In this book, I present aspects of the study that may help readers understand the process of trainers and trainees developing a race sensitive or Afrocentric discourse. I also address some of the black issues that

the study did not have room for because the issue of racism became overwhelming. The study highlighted the importance of understanding how an individual's feelings about racism run the risk of taking over the listening process for black clients in a therapeutic setting. I found that when racism overwhelms discussions, emphasis gets placed on white people's feelings of fear about being members of the oppressor group. This presents a challenge of supporting both black and white trainees to develop their listening skills and their understanding of black issues in the therapeutic process. The classroom is an ideal setting for trainers to support the process of understanding this dynamic, by facilitating the expression by both black and white trainees of feelings and experiences that include the impact of racism.

Questions, concerns and experiences related to black issues that require understanding and reflection often remain unresolved owing to lack of space in training programmes. We must not underestimate the impact that racism can have on training programmes. I have heard white trainees suggest that living in an area where they rarely see black people or not having black clients excludes them from the dynamics of race and black people's experiences. On the other hand, some trainees believe that a friendship with black people or being black British absolves them from the conflicts of stereotyping and prejudice that sometimes impact intercultural relationships. If they are not addressed, these forms of denial can be transferred into therapeutic relationships. Trainees must be encouraged to dialogue about black issues and the impact of racism during their training. Lack of space for these issues constitutes silence, a silence that may also be viewed as colour blindness. Tuckwell (2002) asserts her understanding of silence in relation to racism:

There is a silence generally within our profession concerning racism, but I believe also that a silence can too easily develop in the consulting room. It is a dangerous silence for the therapy because it contains too much background noise for it not to infect all other work we try to do. A frequent response by the black patient is to stop and leave therapy, often silently. Another response is not to enter in the first place, which is the loudest silence of all. (p. 138)

In my attempts to break the silence I found that the notion of 'understanding' featured prominently. Trainee counsellors have frequently expressed an urgency to gain clarity and guidance on how to work more effectively with black issues. Questions about how to understand, explore, address and overcome powerful feelings linked to black issues

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have been raised like a mantra over and over again. This showed an important need to examine their concerns and questions. I have therefore interspersed the questions throughout the chapters to encourage readers to share in further exploration of them. Kareem and Littlewood (1992) exemplify the impact of Eurocentric training on processing silence:

Such intensive training can sometimes be compared to a kind of colonisation of the mind and I constantly had to battle within myself to keep my head above water, to remind myself at every point who I was and what I was. It was a painful difficult battle not to think what I was told to think, not to be what I had been told to be and not to challenge what I had been told could not be challenged and at the same time not to become alienated from my basic roots. (p. 31)

Multicultural, intercultural and transcultural therapeutic approaches have presented various viewpoints on how equality, diversity and oppression in counselling can be approached. These viewpoints provide a useful framework for developing methods to assist the exploration of black issues.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalists Vanoy Adams (1996) and Feltham and Horton (2000) suggest attention should be paid to the many cultural reference points that affect relationships. Ponterotto et al. (2001) argue:

Essential elements of multicultural therapy competence are the therapist's awareness of his or her own cultural heritage, world view and the related values, biases and assumptions about human behaviour, and an understanding of the worldview of the culturally different client. (p. 25)

Multicultural authors tend to dissolve the dominance of white Eurocentric approaches to therapy using a cultural paradigm. A general cultural paradigm can limit attention to the experiences of black therapists/counsellors and clients, because black issues can be neither confined to cultural specifics nor generalised to a focus solely on racism. A process of dilution can take the focus off particular concerns about

black issues and place it on the parallel experiences of other minority groups, missing vital opportunities to explore this concern. Scheurich and Young (1997) referred to the power dynamics that uphold this institutional process as 'epistemological racism'.

It is clear that attention has been paid to addressing gaps in multicultural theory; however, exploration of the experiences of black counsellors and black clients has been limited. This lacuna plays a role in perpetuating the colour blindness of Eurocentric paradigms in the training of therapists.

Although the issues of all minority groups are an important concern, there is a demand for a specific emphasis on models that address and work with black issues. We cannot therefore take for granted that a multicultural theory offers enough for trainees to understand the specific nature of black issues and ways to address them.

Intercultural and Transcultural Approaches

Interculturalists Kareem and Littlewood (1992) and Lago and Thompson (1996) attempt to deal with the specific problem of colour blindness by suggesting that therapists should pay attention to relationships between cultures and within cultural groups. Kareem and Littlewood (1992) suggest, 'Intercultural therapy should never be allowed to become some specialised therapy targeted at black people, but simply therapy that takes into account these issues' (p. 12).

Eleftheriadou (1994) and d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) get closer to the relationship aspect of diversity in their use of transculturalism by suggesting that we must transcend our own cultural reference points, whether they are similar or different, and thus experience ourselves empathically within the culture of another person or group. d'Ardenne and Mahtani (1989) distinguish the transcultural approach: 'We have chosen the term "trans" as opposed to "cross" or "inter" cultural counselling because we want to emphasise the active and reciprocal process that is involved' (p. 5).

In keeping with the need for an active and reciprocal process, Kareem and Littlewood (1992) suggest:

Psychotherapists who are analytically trained learn to work with and understand the patient's inner world only, and therefore for some there is resistance in dealing with psychological problems that

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originate in the real (outer) world. However most black people would admit that the most traumatic feature in their personal lives is to be black in a white society. (p. 25)

It follows that if training promotes an active and reciprocal approach to black issues, then the provision of therapy will become culturally active and reciprocal. This process can afford therapists and clients of African and Asian heritage a more equal share of the pie.

My study resulted in the following main proposals:

- Being active in providing a space for sharing and exploration in training can model greater confidence and dialogue about black issues in client work.
- The different experiences of black and white trainees must be valued.
- Understanding can be supported by modelling the process and dialogue on black issues in training workshops.
- To support the emancipatory and transformative process of the training group, the trainer's personal development process must include an understanding of racism and knowledge of black issues.

All this amounts to an evolving process of understanding ways to find meaning for the emotional wisdom that produces awareness and transformation linked to black issues. The specific process underpinning black issues unfolds in the four parts of the book outlined below. Each part has its own brief introduction. These parts can be likened to stages of the therapeutic process: catharsis, elucidation, exploration and transformation. The chapters in each part represent the emotions of this process. The book ends with suggestions for workshop exercises to assist the exploration of black issues in training.

Questions about black issues raised by trainee counsellors who participated in the study have been integrated throughout the book. I encourage readers to pay attention to these questions and use the content of the book to open dialogue about black issues with colleagues and clients.

The Book's Structure

Part I, 'Shared Concerns', presents an outline of the study (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005) based on trainees' shared concerns. Encouraging

trainees to share their concerns and open a dialogue about black issues was an important feature of the study. Feelings attached to black issues and building connecting responses are considered in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 1, 'A Can of Worms', outlines the study that informs and supports the book. The outpouring of questions and emotions related to black issues can be described as 'a can of worms' because the volatile theme of racism was the biggest concern expressed by trainees.

Chapter 2, 'Feeling It in Our Bones', explores the challenges of journeying through some of the feelings that trainee counsellors associated with black issues and the impact of racism on their client work. Ways to develop a broader understanding that challenges Eurocentric approaches and promotes greater connection to black issues are considered.

Chapter 3, 'A Black Empathic Approach', underscores the importance of a way to understand and connect to the experience of being 'black' in Britain. Drawing on the humanistic concept of empathy, 'a black empathic approach' is used to develop a connection to feelings about difference and sameness and a shared understanding of racism.

In Part II, the concept of 'Recognition Trauma' has been used to assist readers to understand the emotional context of working through the impact of racism on individuals. Therapists are encouraged to engage with ways of understanding responses to black issues and the internal process of racism by developing traditional ideas such as Jung's archetypes.

Chapter 4, 'Healing Ancestral Baggage', engages with transpersonal aspects of black issues by exploring the dynamics of relationships, customs and inherited distress that get passed on by previous generations and expressed in the present. Discussions with trainee counsellors give a flavour of their experiences of working through their concerns about racism. Aspects of psychoanalytic theory are drawn on to support an understanding of the concept of ancestral baggage and the process of recognition trauma.

In Chapter 5, the symptoms and affects of internalised racism are explored using the concept of 'The Black Western Archetype'. To help explain this concept I present a review of therapy with Jacinta, a black lesbian who experienced beatings and used counselling to build her esteem.

Chapter 6, 'Cultural Schizophrenia', addresses issues that affect the mental health treatment of African and Caribbean people. Cultural schizophrenia is a concept used to describe symptoms of mental distress that can be exacerbated by living within or having been influenced by dual or multiple cultures. I present an interview with Angela, a

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middle-aged African Caribbean woman caught up in the revolving door of the mental health system.

The title of Part III speaks for itself: 'Finding a Voice' expresses the challenging yet liberating experience of becoming un-gagged. The study assisted trainees to open a dialogue where there had been silence. Here I have provided a space for the voices of black men and women to be presented.

Chapter 7, 'Breaking the Bonds', presents a model of group work and black women sharing experiences through therapeutic writing. The effects of patriarchy, slavery and colonialism have meant that black women inheriting the trauma of these experiences may be subject to oppression of self over long periods.

Chapter 8, 'The Wounded Warrior', centres on some important aspects of working with black men. A dialogue with a black male psychotherapist, Arike, is supported by the experiences of two Caribbean men: Leroy, an artist, and Byron, a drummer. Byron expresses the importance of feeling the rhythm from within the African experience and of African male role models. He also shares his views on gay issues in the black community.

Counselling and psychotherapy theory is a tool that provides a framework for understanding a personal context of black issues and the impact of racism. Part IV, 'A Bridge from Fear to Transformation', shows how theory can be developed to include cultural constructs that may support black issues. A shift from fear generated by the impact of racism to an active engagement with black issues is supported by experiences of and ideas for working with black issues in the therapeutic process.

Chapter 9, 'Therapeutic Styles and Approach to Client Work', presents the experiences of Beryl and Joyce, African Caribbean counsellors trained in Britain, and the work of Dr Pat, a Ghanaian therapist. Joyce has returned to Jamaica to practise her counselling skills; Beryl uses her African-centred counsellor training to contextualise relationships within the black family. In response to questions about an African-centred approach, Dr Pat talks about how the principles of African tradition can be applied as a healing instrument.

Chapter 10, 'Going All the Way', concludes by drawing together some key learning points from the narratives of trainers and trainees. Some constructive suggestions are made for preparing trainees to explore and understand black issues. These training suggestions have been offered in response to trainees' questions about practice, theory and process.

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