

Third Edition

Skills *in*
PERSON-CENTRED
Counselling & Psychotherapy

Janet Tolan
with Rose Cameron

 **SAGE**

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

Editor: Susannah Trefgarne
Editorial assistant: Edward Coats
Production editor: Rachel Burrows
Copyeditor: Jane Fricker
Proofreader: Andy Baxter
Indexer: Martin Hargreaves
Marketing manager: Camille Richmond
Cover design: Sheila Tong
Typeset by: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CR0 4YY

© Janet Tolan 2003, 2012, 2017
Chapters 7, 8 and 16 © Rose Cameron 2003, 2012, 2017
Chapters 10 and 11 © Rose Cameron 2017
Chapter 15 © Janet Tolan and Rose Cameron 2003,
2012, 2017

First edition published 2003. Reprinted 2003, 2004, 2005,
2006, 2007 (twice), 2009, 2010 (twice)
Second edition published 2012. Reprinted 2012, 2014 (twice)

This third edition first published 2017

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016949469

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-2658-5
ISBN 978-1-4739-2659-2 (pbk)

At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	vi
<i>About the Authors</i>	vii
<i>Preface to the Third Edition</i>	viii
1 The Theoretical Framework	1
2 Empathy	18
3 Empathic Understanding	30
4 Congruence	44
5 Congruence in Practice	53
6 Unconditional Positive Regard	67
Case Study: Accepting a Client Who Tells Lies (Alan Brice)	82
7 Psychological Contact I – Basic and Cognitive Contact (Rose Cameron)	87
8 Psychological Contact II – Subtle Contact (Rose Cameron)	99
9 The Therapeutic Process	107
10 Politics, Prejudice, Power and Privilege (Rose Cameron)	125
11 Client Perception (Rose Cameron)	139
12 Beginnings and Endings	149
13 Managing the Work in an Organisation	167
14 Professional Issues	180
15 Edgy and Ethical Issues (Janet Tolan and Rose Cameron)	192
16 Debates and Developments in Practice (Rose Cameron)	207
<i>References</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	232

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Janet Tolan has worked in counselling and psychotherapy since 1979, as a volunteer, as a full-time counsellor, as leader of Counselling courses at City College, Manchester and as head of the Masters Programme in Counselling and Psychotherapy at Liverpool John Moores University. She has also worked in Management Development and Team Development for large corporations and for small charities. She now has a small private practice, working with individuals, couples, groups and teams – and also enjoys playing bridge, dancing salsa and singing jazz.

Rose Cameron began training as a counsellor in 1989 and worked in the NHS and private practice in Manchester from 1993 until 2009, when she relocated her practice to Edinburgh and Fife. She has been training counsellors and psychotherapists since 1996 and is currently a Teaching Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, where she completed a PhD in counselling and psychotherapy in 2015. She is the author of a number of chapters and papers, the details of which can be found at www.rosecameron.org.

10

POLITICS, PREJUDICE, POWER AND PRIVILEGE

Rose Cameron

The use of the word ‘politics’, as Rogers (1978) points out in his book *Carl Rogers on Personal Power*, changed in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s. Politics is now understood to be concerned not only with the play of power between and within countries, but also with the power relationships between social groups. This chapter discusses the social politics of the worlds in which both client and therapist are immersed, both outside and inside the therapy room. Person-centred therapy is often understood as an encounter between two human beings. It *is* an encounter between two human beings, but to imagine that this encounter is unaffected by the social forces that operate outside – and inside – the therapy room is to deny the reality of the worlds in which both therapist and client live.

Discussion of social politics, particularly racism, usually raises the emotional temperature on training courses. When this happens, those who feel unheard and unseen tend to feel frustrated beyond words, while those who feel accused often become defensive.

It can be hard, in a situation in which the emotional temperature is rising, to risk asking something that sounds naïve or might cause offence. This chapter aims to answer some of the questions that you may be reluctant to ask, and explains some of the terms that are often used when discussing social politics. It uses the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout in recognition that most of us are both given and denied social power by virtue of belonging to various social groups, and therefore occupy positions of ignorance as well as knowledge.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF DIFFERENCE

Social groups are defined in relation to each other: men and women, Black¹ and white; gay and straight; able-bodied and disabled; upper class, middle class and working class. Some of these distinctions are so embedded in our culture that they seem natural. This section will argue that none of these distinctions are ‘natural’, but rather constructed by our collective effort – by society.

Social groups come into being when perceived differences are given social significance. Difference in itself does not create a social grouping – some people have wide feet, and others have narrow feet, but wide-footed people and narrow-footed people do not constitute social groups because there is no social significance attached to the width of our feet. Social significance *is* attached to our genitalia, skin colour, sexuality, physical ability, age, income, job, religion and whether we have a permanent home.

In some instances, it is obvious that the distinction is made by society, rather than nature. Most people accept that class, for instance, arises from a human-made economic system such as feudalism or capitalism rather than, as was thought in the past, being ordained by God. Other distinctions, particularly gender and race, might seem more ‘natural’ – we are, after all, born male or female and white, Black or Asian. But gender and race are also distinctions made by society rather than occurring in nature.

Gender

EXERCISE

Before reading further, make a few notes about what you think determines your gender.

Do this exercise again once you have read this section.

Sex and gender are not the same. ‘Sex’ refers to the genitalia a child is born with, while ‘gender’ refers to those characteristics that society considers masculine, and those considered feminine. There has been a long-running argument as to whether gender characteristics are biologically determined or are created and maintained through social forces: do girls like playing with dolls and boys with guns because they are made that way or because they are subtly – and not so subtly – encouraged to do so? The idea that sex determines gender – that women are ‘naturally’ nurturing and men ‘naturally’ aggressive, for instance – has generally given way to an understanding that

¹Because Black and Asian people share an experience of social exclusion and discrimination, many understand race as a political identity, and capitalise ‘Black’ (as this chapter will do), and, for some, ‘Black’ includes all those, regardless of skin colour, who are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity. Some Irish people, and some Appalachian people, for instance, consider themselves Black.

people have a mix of 'feminine' and 'masculine' characteristics, or indeed that it is not useful to apportion human characteristics in this way in the first place.

Society's understanding of the sex we are is also changing. Male and female may seem like the most natural of social distinctions. Our sex is announced – constantly – from the moment of birth. We are given a sex before we are given a name, and when we are given a name, it is either a boy's name or a girl's name. However, the fact that quite a few people have a mix of male and female genitalia (and may not know – some women, for instance, have testicles hidden inside their bodies) has, very recently, come more fully into public awareness. The most basic social grouping – male or female – does not actually have the very clear biological basis that we have ascribed to it. Not everyone is clearly and simply a man or a woman.

Gender has, in many respects, become less firmly attached to sex, and gender identification has become much more fluid. Many people with penises identify and live as women, and many people with vaginas identify and live as men. Some, but not all, have their bodies surgically altered to match the gender they identify with. Others identify as being of the third gender, or as women on some days and men on other days. Non-binary gender is still a difficult concept for many people in Britain, although long recognised in other parts of the world (there are links at the end of this section to websites giving a geographical and historical overview of non-binary gender and a list of different terms used by people who are not cisgender and who do not identify as either a male or female).

Neither sex nor gender are the clear and unalterable categories that that we once thought they were. They might, instead, be thought of as ideas that are used to help us organise society. A significant number of potential clients find these distinctions extremely *unhelpful*, and so it important that we examine the ways in which we consciously and unconsciously use them.

EXERCISE

A week after your first session with a new male client, a woman arrives at his appointment time. She brushes past you and sits down. As you are trying to collect your thoughts, you realise that she is the person you met for the first time last week. She starts talking about her week and makes no reference to the change in her appearance.

How might you think about the change in your client's appearance? Might you wonder if he or she is a transvestite? Transitioning gender? Experiencing multiple identities? Trying to confuse you?

What ideas about sex and gender are you using when you consider these possibilities?

Look back at the notes you made earlier about gender. Has your understanding changed at all?

A geographical and historical overview of non-binary gender can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_gender.

A list of different terms used by people who are not cisgender – who do not identify as either a male or female – can be found at http://nonbinary.org/wiki/Main_Page.

Race

EXERCISE

Before reading further, write a few notes about what you understand by ‘race’ and ‘racial difference’.

Do this exercise again once you have read this section.

Race and ethnicity are often confused. Ethnicity refers to our identification with a group through a shared culture and language. Race is a wider category – and a more contentious concept. This section explains why the very idea of race is so emotionally charged and what is meant when it is said that race is not real, and what is meant when it is said that race *is* real. It ends by explaining why the conversation about race and biology has recently become potentially confusing. Understanding the sometimes complex ideas explained in this section may be of more immediate relevance to the training room than the therapy room. These ideas are (or should be) discussed in the training room because race impacts the social identity of all those who live in Europe, Scandinavia, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other racialised countries.

The physical features that you might think of as denoting your race – the colour of your skin and eyes, the texture of your hair, the shape of your facial features and other inherited physical features – actually denote your ‘phenotype’. Scientific race theories propose that there are *additional* inherent differences that make the members of a particular race the same as each other and different to people of other races. The term ‘race’ was introduced by Georges-Louis Buffon (1707–88), who believed that Adam and Eve were Caucasian, and that other races came about by a process of degeneration caused by environmental factors, such as exposure to the sun and bad nutrition. The number of races identified by different theorists ranged from three to ten, and, in some classifications, included the Scots and the Irish as distinct races. Some scientists and philosophers thought that different races had different origins: the words ‘race’ and ‘species’ were used interchangeably until the 18th century.

The notion of race did not emerge from scientific evidence – rather evidence was sought to support the idea that racial difference is more than skin deep. Evidence that there are ‘natural’ distinctions to be made among races (and that the ‘Europeanus’ is gentle, acute, inventive, and the ‘Africanus’ crafty, sly and careless) was sought by measuring bodily parts (‘anthropometry’), studying bodily fluids (‘serology’) and ‘craniometry’ (measuring skulls). Later scientists used IQ tests to look for evidence that intelligence is linked to race. Others looked for ‘race genes’.

The idea of advancement and backwardness, superiority and inferiority is inherent to scientific race theories (or 'scientific racism' as it is also known). The use of these theories has a particularly contentious, painful and shameful history. Scientific racism was elaborated in conjunction with the transatlantic slave trade. Slavery had existed prior to this, and people from Africa were enslaved and transported along with peoples from elsewhere, but slavery gradually became about race rather than religion or economic status.

The idea that Africans and their descendants – Black people – are lower down the evolutionary scale and therefore inferior to everyone else was used to justify this change: the whole notion of race was created and used in order to justify the abuse of power. The idea of there being a hierarchy among races also enabled Europe and America to abuse the indigenous populations in Africa, the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and India while espousing freedom and equality (among men, but not women) at home. European thought was not shamed into (largely) giving up the idea that there are significant biological differences within and between races until the Nazis used it to justify their genocide of the 'race' of Jews.

Numerous biological theories of race have been thoroughly discredited, and the vast majority of contemporary scientists agree that race has no biological basis. There is only one race – the human race. There are no neurological patterns and no 'race genes' that distinguish all white people, or all Black people or all Asian people. Making distinctions between people on the basis of their skin colour, the shape of their facial features and the texture of their hair is, biologically, as random as making distinctions based on the width of their toenails or the size of their ears. This is what people mean when they say that, scientifically, race is not real.

Although the whole idea of race is based upon discredited scientific theories, race is real in that it has a real impact on real lives. It impacts what sort of housing we are likely to live in, our experience of education, our relationship with the police and the courts, the kinds of jobs we are welcomed into (or not) and our life expectancy. This is what people mean when they say that race *is* real.

Science did not discover race – it invented it. It has, more recently, been at pains to reject race as a *scientific* reality. The scientific community's slow progression towards a unanimous rejection of biological race theory culminated, in 2000, with the first human genome researchers² standing with President Clinton as he announced that all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9% the same, and affirmed that the concept of race has no scientific basis.

Having confirmed that, genetically, there is only one human race, human genome research was initially colour-blind. However, within a few years, researchers realised that in ignoring colour, they were unintentionally discriminating on the basis of colour. Having established that the genome of all human beings is 99.9% the same and that there is only one human race, genome researchers did not, initially, see a problem in most of their research subjects being white.

However, although the variations in our genomic makeup are very slight, they are important because they help explain why some people get certain diseases while

²Human genome sequencing aims to personalise medicine through understanding the whole of a patient's 'genome' – their entire genetic information and DNA sequence.

others do not. Unless an identical twin, everyone's genome is slightly different from everyone else's. We inherit some variations from one or both parents, and if a relatively small population of people, with all their genetic variations, gets separated from other populations, they'll pass down those variations to their descendants. Eventually, those particular variations become more common in that particular population. This means that particular diseases are more common in particular populations. The initial human genome research had, in using white people as research subjects, only discovered the genomes that cause disease mainly in white people.

The scientific community was initially discomfited at the idea of sequencing the genomes of groups of people from different continents or with different ancestries: the idea summoned the spectre of biological race theory. Many now see a re-engagement with the social reality of race as *the* priority in genome research. Genomic research has the potential to reduce health inequalities. 'Health inequalities', such as there being three times the instance of prostate cancer in Black men as in white men, are inequalities that are avoidable. Some health inequalities result from social injustice – being chronically sleep deprived because you have to work three badly paid jobs to pay for either food or heating – but not both – is bad for your health. Other health inequalities, such as that created when the first genome researchers discovered the genomic variants that mainly cause disease in white people, arise through an inequality in medical provision.

This is where it gets complicated, and it gets complicated because the *social* category of race is being used in a scientific context, and in that context 'race' is a meaningless term. The current genome research suggests that a population that was historically isolated is likely to have a higher instance of particular genomic variations. This is different to biological race theory. Genomic research does *not* support the idea that the members of any particular race share some biological feature that make them alike and different to the members of other races – or that some races are superior to others. There are many different genetically significant 'clusters' within continental populations and within perceived racial groups. It is still the case that there can be as big a genetic difference between someone from Nigeria and someone from Zimbabwe as between someone from Nigeria and someone from Norway. There are no race genes.

However, although race is still not scientifically 'real', it is a social reality, and genomic research can be used to reduce health inequalities. This means that as well as working with biologically meaningful categories such as 'clusters', researchers also work with the biologically meaningless racial categories that previous scientists worked so hard to construct, and then dismantle. To complicate matters further, some scientists have suggested that 'race' is a good term for 'genomic clusters', and even that some genomic clusters correspond to perceived racial distinctions.

Genomic research has moved from being what the sociologist Catherine Bliss calls a 'race-free' science to being a 'race-positive' science. Having invented race, science now has the potential to stop some of the harm caused by our legacy of scientific race theory.

It seems likely that science's re-engagement with race will change the way that we talk about race, and may even change the way that we see ourselves. Race is an unfolding social conversation.

EXERCISE

Look back at the notes you made earlier about race. Has your understanding changed at all?

BEING ADVANTAGED AND BEING DISADVANTAGED

Race and gender are *social* realities that profoundly affect almost all aspects of our lives. Some are given social advantage by their racial identity; others are pushed to the margins. Groups are ‘marginalised’ when the shared experience that forms their group membership is of not being thought of, not being invited in, not being welcomed, included or valued. Disability is a particularly clear example of exclusion because it involves overt, physical exclusion. Disabled people do not fall into some sort of ‘natural’ group because they all share something that makes them biologically similar to each other and different to everyone else – they don’t. What they do share is the continual experience of not being included, and still, despite legislation, being prevented from physically including themselves; of being stared at and of being belittled or patronised. These psychological wounds are also inflicted, often more subtly, on the basis of race and gender – and sexuality and ethnicity.

Many people are members of more than one marginalised social group. The term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced, by Black feminists, to foster a recognition that different forms of oppression – racism, sexism, homophobia, class discrimination, etc. – interact with each other to impact lives in numerous and complex ways.

EXERCISE

Your client is a young, asylum-seeking mother. She would love to find work and so lift herself and her child out of severe poverty, but as an asylum-seeker, she is not allowed to work. Even if she were allowed to work, as a woman, a young person and obviously foreign, she would be unlikely to find reliable work that covered her basic expenses. She is desperately lonely, but feels mistrustful of others after seeing her family killed by neighbours in the ethnic war she is seeking refuge from, and then being raped by the soldiers who rescued her. She has been spat at in the street by men from her own community, and by members of her host community. She feels unwelcome, anxious and desolate.

What do you think would be truly helpful to this client?

‘Kyriarchy’, from the Greek *kyrios*, meaning lord or master, and *arche*, meaning dominion and rule, is a term used to recognise that most of us *also* belong to socially *privileged* groups, and can ‘pull rank’ if we want to.

EXERCISE

What are your 'master powers'? Being a man? Able-bodied? Middle class?

Can you think of any instances in which you have used a master power to pull rank?

PREJUDICE

Assumptions are made about us – and we make assumptions about others – on the basis of the social groups we belong to.

We are told that members of a group are like each other and unlike others – and so tend to see ourselves, and others, in this way. This invites prejudice. Prejudice – which simply means having a preconceived opinion – involves making a judgement without direct experience. I may judge someone as lazy after spending time with them, but if I make this judgement not on the basis of my experience, but because they are young and unemployed, I bring a prejudice, a pre-existing judgement, to the relationship. In person-centred terms, prejudices are introjects – attitudes, beliefs and ideas that we have accepted, without examination, from others.

We can be prejudiced *in favour* of particular people. We might, for instance, think positively of women as being in touch with their feelings, or people who have lived through very difficult circumstances as being strong. Prejudice prevents us from seeing others as they actually are – and prevents us seeing ourselves as we actually are. The notion of projection³ is useful in thinking about prejudice because it explains how we project onto others qualities that we do not want to recognise in ourselves. Projection is usually thought about at an individual level, but it can also be used to understand group prejudice. Anti-Semitic propaganda in Nazi Germany, for instance, portrayed Jews as heartless, bloodthirsty, child-killing enemies of humanity who wanted to control the world (while presenting Nazis as noble saviours). This process of creating an 'other' who is different from 'us' enables us to deny qualities that we find unacceptable. We dehumanise ourselves, as well as the other when we polarise human attributes in this way. 'Othering' enables us to act out our fear of these qualities by persecuting those onto whom we are projecting. 'Us and them' thinking indicates that we have a prejudice. It also indicates that we are incongruent, seeing something in the other while denying it in ourselves.

³Projection is a psychodynamic notion that is often used by practitioners of other theoretical models. Rogers talks about denial and distortion, and projection may be understood as a form of distortion.

EXERCISE

What are you not? Lazy, perhaps? Ambitious? Aggressive? Easily led? Disorganised? What else are you not?

Which groups of people do you think (generally) are? You may want, in your thinking about this question, to also think about less frequently mentioned social groups such as people belonging to a particular religion, or homeless people.

(*Really?* You have no preconceptions at all? You've never thought that all men – or all women – are a certain way?)

Prejudice can stop us seeing people as they actually are, and can also stop those towards whom we hold a negative – or positive – prejudice seeing themselves as they really are. Prejudice, whether negative or positive, is potentially harmful to the person we are prejudiced against or in favour of. We communicate our image of each other in a myriad of different ways, some of them very subtle, and many of them out of conscious awareness. In doing so we show the image we have made to the person we are looking at (and perhaps not seeing).

As Chapter 1 explains, the point of person-centred therapy is to help clients deny and distort less. Reflecting back a distorted image – even if it is positively distorted – is psychologically harmful rather than helpful. Accurate reflections are potentially healing. Distorted reflections are potentially destructive, even if they seem positive. We might, for example, subtly communicate that we see a client as capable and resourceful when in fact they feel vulnerable and needy. In doing so we offer a condition of worth, rather than unconditional acceptance of the client's current organismic experience. In such an instance, the client might well 'pull themselves together' and although this may seem helpful in the short-term, they remain incongruent and psychologically stressed.

Although prejudice is potentially harmful to the person towards whom we are prejudiced, it is not *necessarily* harmful. All things being equal, the person about whom we have made assumptions may be able to shrug our prejudice off. But relationships between different social groups are rarely equal. Some groups have more power. Prejudice when combined with power becomes an entirely different thing. The next section discusses what power means in the context of social relationships.

POWER

Power enables us to do things. Power over others enables us to make them do things; it allows us to force, manipulate, persuade, coerce or nudge another person into behaving the way we want them to behave. When power is conferred by one's social position, it is called 'structural power'. Prejudice in the minds of those with structural power

cannot be shrugged off. Those in positions of power are able to enforce their prejudices by discriminating in favour of some, and against others. They can wreck your life.

Structural power is conferred according to one's position within the structures that we use to arrange our communal lives – the family, work, clubs, societies, gangs, parliament, etc. Most social institutions are hierarchical and so put some people at the top – the head of the family, leader of the gang, the company director, etc. The manager, head of the family and leader of the gang are seen as having the right to do things that others are not given the right to do, and the right to make others do – or not do – something.

Society's less concrete institutions – race, gender and class, for instance – are also hierarchies that give some groups power over others. The dominance of one social group over others is called 'hegemony'. Dominant social groups set the rules, and until challenged (and sometimes even when challenged), generally set the rules in their own favour. The majority of those in positions of political power are usually members of socially dominant groups. They make and administer the laws we are all obliged to live by.

Thus, in Britain most politicians are white, able-bodied men and those who are gay have, until recently, felt they have to hide their sexuality if they want to retain their position of power. At the time of writing, those in the top positions of political power are also from the wealthy, privileged and well-connected upper classes. The same generalisations can be made of the judiciary. Most police officers are white, able-bodied men and many who are gay still feel they have to hide their sexuality.

Hegemony is maintained most obviously and most brutally by violence. Some violence is overtly legally sanctioned. It has, for example, been, and in some places still is, legal for a man to be physically violent towards his wife, and for her to be legally obliged to have sex with him whenever he wants her to. Sometimes, violence is against the law, but sanctioned (or even perpetrated) by the police and the courts.

The granting of certain rights to some, while denying them to others is also a particularly blatant way in which hegemony is upheld through the law. The law can also be used to equalise social relationships (this is usually preceded by a long, concerted struggle by large numbers of those who have been denied rights). Depending on what country you live in, it may be tempting to think that legislation that addresses inequalities with regard to race, gender, sexuality and disability has equalised social relationships.

This is almost never the case. If laws are not complied with willingly, they need to be enforced. This takes an effort of will on the part of not only the police, legal profession and the courts, but, in cases in which a private prosecution must be brought, individuals like you or me. The very fact that such legislation is needed, and needs to be enforced, says much about the culture that denied equal rights. The law usually takes a very long time to change. Culture takes even longer.

Power is expressed and maintained not only through law, but also through culture. Cultural institutions such as the media, the entertainment industry, education, the art establishment, academia, etc., are generally controlled by socially dominant groups and disseminate ideas and images that reflect the interests, values and beliefs of those groups. 'Hegemony' is also used to describe the dominant position of a particular set of ideas and values that have become so accepted that it becomes very difficult to

articulate, or to even think about, alternative ideas. These ideas become social norms, and are so ubiquitous that it can be difficult to recognise that they are a particular set of possible values and beliefs.

The values inherent in all therapeutic approaches reflect, to some degree, the social values of the context in which they originated and developed. Most therapeutic methods originate with white, middle-class men and have largely been developed by white, middle-class men (although most practitioners, in the person-centred approach at least, are women). In accepting and communicating these values, might we be subtly imposing them on a client who has a different set of values? Autonomy and individuality, for example, might be seen as very white, very American – and very male – values. Do we take each client's social context into account when developing a shared language with them, or do we impose a professional vocabulary?

EXERCISE

How do you think the values of the wider society you live in impact your practice?

How do you use the values of the wider societies you live in to frame your identity as a therapist?

Do you, for instance, see yourself as challenging or upholding the political status quo? Do you see yourself as politically subversive in helping clients empower themselves, or do you see yourself as helping clients live within the boundaries that are necessary to keep society functioning?

PREJUDICE WITH POWER

It is when prejudice is combined with structural power that it becomes an 'ism'. 'Sexism' involves not only prejudice against women, but also the structural power to belittle and disadvantage women through social institutions such as the workplace, the law, the media, the arts and education. It is the same with racism. A Black person may have a prejudice against a white person, but this is simply a prejudice and not racism because, in our racist society, the systems of power are in the white person's favour. The white person can choose to shrug the prejudice off. This is not the case for the Black person, who is constantly affected by the weight and power of collective prejudice. Prejudice in the mind of someone with social power can determine whether you get the job you are qualified to do, whether you are educated in a way that honours your heritage and whether you are more likely to have your children taken into care. Sexism and racism – and other power relationships in which one social group has the power to enforce its prejudices – may be thought of as collective bullying. Even when dealing with one individual bully, you know that the others are there, waiting.

Although people are still physically assaulted and even murdered on account of their gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality, there is a recognition that much of the

bullying has become more subtle. According to the counsellor and writer Derald Wing Sue, 'microaggressions' are different from blatant, deliberate acts of bigotry because they are not intended to wound, and research shows that most perpetrators of microaggressions consider themselves to be unprejudiced (Evans, 2009). We perpetrate microaggressions when we:

- ◆ demean another on the basis of their race, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.
- ◆ use stereotypes or assume all members of a marginalised social group are the same
- ◆ express disapproval of or discomfort with a marginalised social group
- ◆ assume that our own values and traditions are normal and that those of other groups are weird or wrong
- ◆ deny the existence of discrimination or minimise its seriousness.

The effect of microaggressions can be as serious as overt aggression, and although not intended to be hurtful, the cumulative effect of microaggressions can lead to a distorted self-concept, diminished self-confidence and self-worth, depression and anxiety. Microaggressions are often ambiguous or subtle, and this adds another layer of difficulty in that you might be perceived as over-reacting (or indeed perceive yourself to be over-reacting). The cumulative effects of the slight and the subtle can be as corrosive as the overt and violent.

PRIVILEGE

Groups who hold power maintain the social hierarchy that benefits them by conferring privileges upon themselves, while denying these privileges to others. Some privileges are blatant, such as the right to wear a crown. Others are more subtle, and many might be thought of as human rights, but rather than being granted to all human beings, they are denied to many and so become privileges. Such privileges are numerous, and include:

- ◆ walking in public places without fear of being verbally or physically attacked because of your gender, clothing, colour of your skin or sexuality
- ◆ being welcomed into the workplace/education, and treated fairly
- ◆ not having to worry about whether your teacher or manager (or therapist) will expect you to have sex with them
- ◆ feeling valued as a customer, rather than watched as a probable thief
- ◆ being able to get into, and around shops, educational facilities, business premises (including counselling rooms) and friends' houses.

Those of us who enjoy privilege often do so without awareness. Nothing forces us to be aware that someone else is being denied what we take for granted. As a recent

newspaper article put it, 'Most of the time being white is an absence of problems. The police don't bother you so you don't notice the police not bothering you. You get the job so you don't notice not getting it. Your children are not confused with criminals.'⁴

EXERCISE

Some of the suggestions below will be more relevant to some readers than others. Feel free to make up challenges that are relevant to your specific social positions.

- If you think that legislation means that you can hold hands with your same-sex spouse in public, test it out – ask a friend to help and the next time you go shopping, or out for a meal or a drink, or go to a sporting event, hold hands throughout.

You don't want to do that? Why not?

- If you think that legislation means that all public spaces are now accessible, work out over the next few days – as you use public transport, go into your workplace, shops, the cinema, pub, a restaurant, etc. – how you would get into these public spaces if you were in a wheelchair.

Would you, if you found yourself unable to get into a public place, take a lawsuit out against the offender? Thought not. Legal action is time-consuming, stressful and very expensive. Lots of public spaces fail to comply with the law, but nobody, assuming that they could afford to do so, wants to spend their lives embroiled in one lawsuit after another.

- If you think legislation has ended racial discrimination, use the name 'Ogbuefi Ezeuder' to make online reservations in a couple of bed and breakfasts. If they have no space, try making the same reservations in the name 'Sally White'.

Privilege is what we swim around in when we have structural power, and so we are often unaware of its presence in our lives. We can't assume that a client whose social position is different to our own lives in the same world that we do – or that we are familiar with their world. 'Whites who are effective seem to learn two attitudes', writes Rogers, 'the first is the realisation and ownership of the fact that "I think white"'. For men trying to deal with women's rage, it might be helpful for the man to recognise "I think male"' (1978: 133). We all need to recognise the filters of privilege

⁴www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/jan/10/white-man-pathology-bernie-sanders-donald-trump

through which we experience the world if we are to have any hope of entering the internal frame of reference of the other.

CONCLUSION

An imbalance of power is inherent in the therapeutic relationship – we, for instance, know the most sensitive and intimate things about our clients, while they know very little about us. When we bring our membership of the various social groups we belong to into the therapy room, as we inevitably do, the power relationship becomes more complex. Not only do we have structural power as a therapist, but also as a white person, perhaps, or a man, as middle class. The structural power that we have (whether we want it or not) may lend weight to our words, respectability to our opinions and gravitas to our presence. Or perhaps our membership of some social groups disempowers us within the therapeutic relationship: we may feel (or be) patronised by a client on the basis of our class or gender or because we have a visible disability. The next chapter examines some of the ways in which social politics might impact clients' perception of the therapist.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Marsaili Cameron, Mona Washington and Carol Tibi for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

FURTHER READING

- Bliss, C. (2012) *Race Decoded: The Genomic Fight for Social Justice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bornstein, K. and Bergman, S.B. (2010) *Gender Outlaws*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Kearney, A. (1996) *Counselling, Class and Politics: Undeclared Influences in Therapy*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
- Lago, C. (2010) *The Handbook for Transcultural Counselling and Psychotherapy*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Lago, C. and Smith, B. (2010) *Anti-Discriminatory Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2nd edn). London: Sage.
- Proctor, G. (2002) *The Dynamics of Power in Counselling and Psychotherapy: Ethics, Politics and Practice*. Ross-on-Wye: PCCS Books.
- Rogers, C. (1978) *Carl Rogers on Personal Power*. London: Constable.