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## PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

### Possibilities and limitations of anti-racist training within a counselling programme

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#### ABSTRACT

This research presents a thematic analysis from the participants of a specific anti-racism session within counselling education in a university setting. The research team were a self-chosen subset of the participants, and the themes came from reflections of the participants at the start and end of the session. The three main themes are: defensiveness, openness, and engagement, and each also had sub-themes. These themes are discussed and recommendations for future anti-racism education are elucidated.

**KEYWORDS:** anti-racism; decolonisation; psychotherapy training; radical spaces

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to offer insight into the factors that determined the impact of an anti-racism teaching session within a professional training course in counselling and psychotherapy. The session aimed to help students on this programme consider their racial identity and what it is to be anti-racist. It also set out to examine the impact of racism in society and its relevance to themselves as therapists, their clients, and the therapy relationship. We hope our analysis and recommendations can inform the design of future sessions, maximising the course's potential to disrupt the centrality of whiteness (Downes &

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Taylor, 2021), the Eurocentrism of psychotherapy training (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005), and rise to the ongoing calls to decolonise the curriculum (e.g., Charles, 2019).

We write as the tutor who prepared and facilitated this session (G.P.), an invited tutor (D.C.), and a group of students who were part of the student cohort on this programme (K.W., T.D., and M.W.). This is a follow-up to two previous articles, 'Beyond the "sticking plaster"? Meaningful teaching and learning about race and racism in counselling and psychotherapy training' (Proctor et al., 2021) and 'Listen with love: Exploring anti-racism dialogue in psychotherapy and counselling training' (Denyer et al., 2022). The first reflects on the same session the previous year. The second explores our reflective process, and the fertile discomfort and uncertain meeting that arose in our research group as we engaged with responses students had written to George Yancy's (2015) letter 'Dear White America'.

The majority of this article is a presentation and discussion of the results of a thematic analysis of data drawn from questions participants answered, in writing, at the beginning and the end of the session. We hope this analysis offers a robust way to understand the common elements that enable students to engage with and learn from anti-racism training and those factors that inhibit learning or development. Arising from this we make recommendations for future anti-racism sessions on the programme.

## **CURRENT GLOBAL CONTEXT OF BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTEST DURING COVID-19**

To set the scene for this article it is important for us to note the current (2020–2021) global context in which we have seen a global awakening to the impact of racism discrimination and prejudice towards black and ethnic people all over the world. The murdering of Mr George Floyd (a black man) at the hands of police in the USA sparked widespread protests internationally, which signified a paradigm shift in the collective unconscious of communities, as evidenced by people from all ethnic groups coming to speak about this and wider racial and social injustice in society.

Being a part of society, in which the fibre of the tapestry includes social injustice, racism, and inequality, informs our desire for continued action for anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice. Thankfully, over the last few decades there has been a continual and essential increase in those who have offered a much-needed critical psychological perspective and counter narrative to the mainstream discourse. To name a few, this includes writing on intercultural therapy and transcultural therapy (Alessandrini, 1998; D'Ardenne & Mahtani 1999; Kareem & Littlewood, 1999; Lago, 2006). It also includes Thomas (1992) writing on racism and psychotherapy, Miller-Loessi and Parker (2006) focusing on cross cultural social psychology, McKenzie-Mavinga (2009) on her writing on black issues in psychotherapy, and Moodley and Walcott (2010), whose perspectives cover

counselling across and beyond cultures. In addition, Lago (2011) edited a collection of chapters on transcultural therapy perspectives, whilst Lee (2013) did similar in relation to multicultural issues in counselling.

Whilst what we have noted here are only a few contributions to the importance of anti-racist training within counselling training programmes, there are a plethora of sources within the literature, some of which the students who participated in this module engaged with. This article aims to offer critical reflections and radical propositions which speak to challenge the systemic failure of attention to diversity in our counselling and psychotherapy training and profession at large.

Many of the counselling and psychotherapy professional bodies (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy [UKCP], British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], British Psychological Society [BPS]) have written public facing statements in response to Mr George Floyd's murder. There have been hundreds of responses from counsellors and psychotherapists responding to the impact they felt and also from many therapists from black and ethnic minority backgrounds who voiced experiences of racism, oppression, and tokenistic diversity sessions within counselling and psychotherapy training. Thus, through this article we offer perspectives which outline why we must all actively engage in action to address issues that are at the root of not only societal injustice and inequality in our society but also within our profession. These include inequality, racism, and the barriers to accessing or completing psychotherapy training. It is important for counselling and psychotherapy training to be truly anti-racist and produce qualified therapists who are culturally competent to work in a culturally and racially diverse world (Charura & Lago, 2021).

## **CONTEXT AND AIM OF THIS TEACHING SESSION**

G.P.: I lead a module as part of the BACP-accredited MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling programme at the University of Leeds in the north of England, entitled 'Ethical and cultural issues in counselling and psychotherapy'. The majority of the teaching time (8 of 15 sessions) focuses on inequalities, identities, and power issues in therapy. The session that this article discusses in more depth covers racism and culture, and the aims are for students to consider their own identities with respect to ethnicity and experiences of racism, the relevance of this to working with clients of all identities, and how to take an anti-racist approach within the profession and society. This year was the second time I covered this subject. As a result of evaluating and discussing the session the previous year with students (see Proctor et al., 2021), I wanted students to think in this session about their own cultural identities and perceived ethnicity, and to problematise whiteness, not minoritised ethnic identities. I wanted whiteness to be decentred and students to explore decolonisation. I also

wanted students to have space to discuss the racialised dynamics within their own cohort. I had invited D.C., a black counselling tutor who had written on this subject in counselling to facilitate this session with me and we organised and prepared this session together. This was to ensure that students who experience racism would not feel alone in representing these experiences—a recommendation from the previous session evaluation (see Proctor et al., 2021). I felt it was important that I also facilitated as a white tutor although was also aware of potentially perpetuating white supremacist dynamics by my position to invite D.C. However, I hoped for an opportunity to model working together with respect and a de-centring and disrupting of whiteness, which was our shared aim. I (and many others) have had much experience of trying to discuss the dominance of whiteness in counselling contexts and wanting white therapists to take responsibility for thinking about our own heritage and how that impacts on our identities and relationships, rather than relying on (our few) colleagues from minoritised identities to educate us about the impact of racism, and in doing so I have encountered much defensiveness. I was particularly aware that the student cohort (of 22) was predominately white, with only three students of colour, so the experience of whiteness was dominant in the group. While I also encounter defensiveness in counselling contexts to addressing inequalities with respect to gender, I was aware there would be particular issues with a cohort where the dominance of whiteness was so profound. In relation to gender, this cohort was predominantly female, thus bringing a different dynamic. My main aim was to facilitate discussions, provoke thought on this topic, and loosen ideas rather than provoke defensiveness, hoping that students go away thinking it is a topic relevant to all of them and awareness of how much more work there is to be done to take an anti-racist stance.

Many resources were made available prior to the session and students chose a particular theme to research in advance of the session. During the teaching session, the first half of the session was an encounter style discussion with a couple of questions to focus the discussion ('Who are you in relation to your ethnicity and cultural background? How does this position you within this group and what is the impact of these differences within the group?'). After a break, students discussed with their peers in their theme groups for 20 minutes, then each group had five minutes to present their key points for consideration to the whole student group (16 students) followed by 15 minutes of whole group discussion. This process just fitted into the three-hour teaching slot (which included a 20-minute break).

### **A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

People who experience racism are not a homogeneous group. The terms 'people of colour' and 'Black and Asian minority ethnic' have been critiqued for erasing the multiple identities of the people who fall within those categories, while also creating a group that can be 'othered' within institutions and social structures (DaCosta et al., 2021). 'White' is also not

an adequate term to describe the variety of origins and backgrounds of those who can be racialised that way. Nonetheless, while staying aware of the power dynamics at play in who is applying what label to whom, it is valuable to have umbrella terms that help us discuss and conceptualise how racism functions. We are using a broad definition of racism, understanding it to operate at an individual, cultural, and structural level (Shiao & Woody, 2021). We have opted to use the terms 'people who experience racism' and 'people who do not experience racism' to delineate two broad groups in our society and the participants in our research in an attempt to avoid some of the issues mentioned above. We acknowledge these are unsatisfactory in so far as they are passive descriptors, suggesting a lack of agency, rather than an affirmative sense of identity. Within each group there will be diversity of racialised experiences, and for those who experience racism, it will impact their lives to different extents.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants*

All of the participants were students in the second year of the Psychotherapy and Counselling MA at the University of Leeds. The post-it notes were written anonymously so we cannot link responses to specific identities. In the overall cohort, 19 of the students were white and three were people of colour (one black, one black/mixed heritage, and one South Asian). Twenty of the cohort were women, and two were men.

### *Researchers*

The researchers were volunteers from the same cohort as the participants, who had also taken part in the data collection prior to knowing about the research opportunity. There were five initial researchers who were present for data collection and analysis. Three identify as white, one as black, and one as South Asian. Three of the researchers are women, and two are men. Over the course of the project, two have left the team and we write as the remaining three researchers.

### *Procedure*

- The student cohort were given three coloured post-it notes at the start of the session. They were asked to write 'anticipations', 'hopes', and 'fears' about the

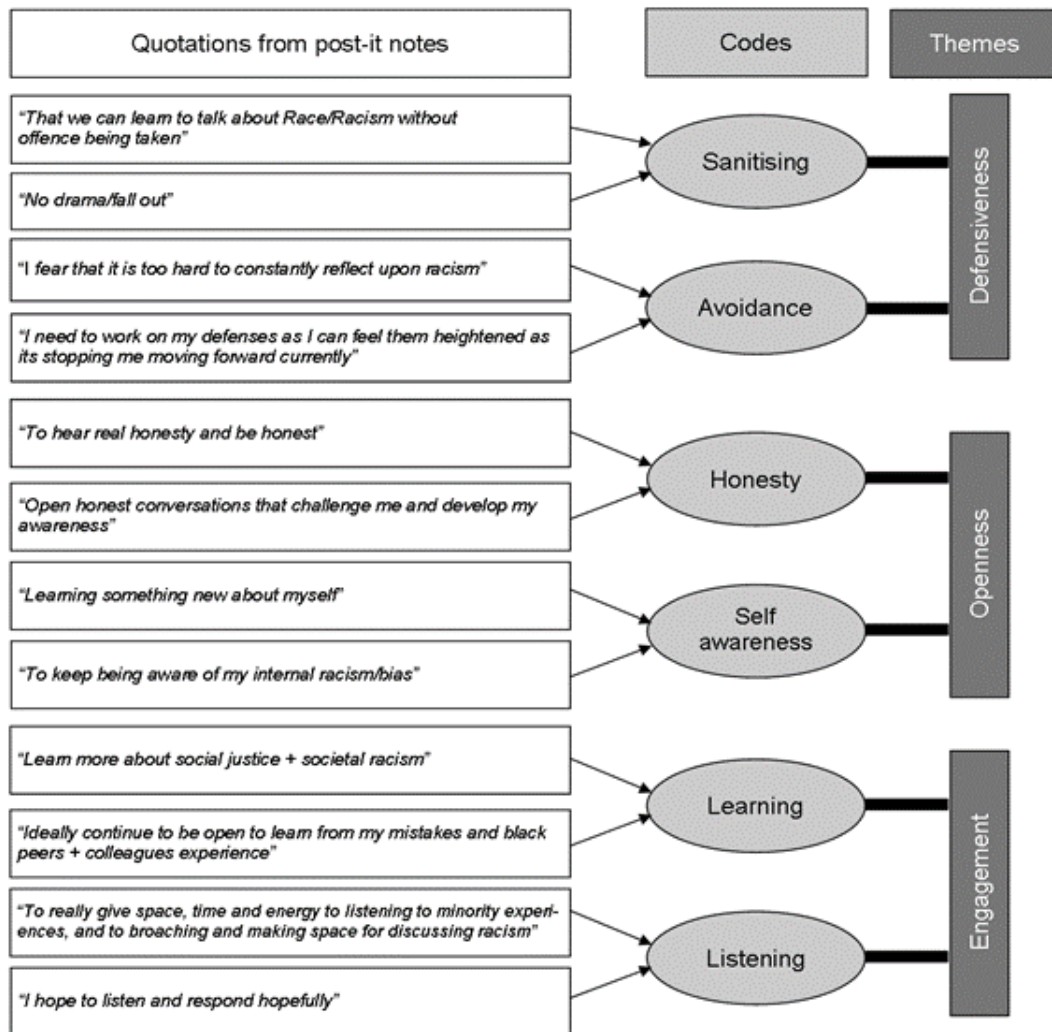
upcoming session, with each on a separate colour, and to stick them on the wall alongside the post-it notes of the rest of the class.

- The students were asked to do the same at the end of the session but under the headings of 'feelings', 'still feel stuck', and 'future action'.
- After the session the post-it notes were gathered into six categories under each heading and distributed amongst the researchers for analysis.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

We carried out a thematic analysis of these responses in line with the steps set out in Braun and Clarke's (2006) overview of the method. We used an inductive approach where the themes were decided by looking across the data for repeated patterns of meaning, in contrast to trying to fit them into an existing model or around a specific question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our epistemology is a realist one, where we're assuming we can theorise motivations, meaning, and experience in a straightforward way rather than looking beyond what has been written. The analysis has been a recursive process, moving back and forth between the dataset and our notes and write-up as we attempt to theorise the significant patterns and their broader meanings. The process started with coding all 123 post-it note responses into meaningful units of text. Units of text that shared meaning were then grouped together forming initial categories. The same unit of text could be included in multiple categories. Once this analysis was complete, we arranged the categories into themes. While carrying out this analysis and working on the Yancy response letters in our research group, we were differently but universally confronted by complex and sometimes painful reactions to the process and one another. We were learning together to navigate the dynamics we surfaced, and they were often in parallel with, or mirroring, the content of the work we were doing. Some reflections on how this was for each of us are captured below.

Figure 1. Example of Our Coding Process



## REFLECTIONS ON WORKING TOGETHER

K.W.: As a person of colour, specifically a mixed-heritage, black person of colour, this research has a deeply personal sting to it. I was continually aware of being caught in the dichotomy of feeling both part of the research group whilst also being other. There was something isolating about how deeply I felt wounded at times. When I think back on the beginnings of our time as a research group I can remember the anxiety that would surface before each meeting. Racism has penetrated my life and played such a significant role in many of my traumas that I was frightened to potentially expose these parts of my experience with others who cannot truly understand. The prospect of exploring racism with a majority white group was scary. It challenged me to express my feelings honestly, even challenging feelings such as anger or frustration. I found our group to be receptive to all



experiences, allowing for the differences in our opinions and experiences. Perhaps the biggest thing I have learned is that I would rather have an emotional, messy discussion about racism during which mistakes are welcomed and resolved, than the hollow and painful quiet as experienced during the university seminar. The acceptance I found in this group and growing confidence helped inspire the courage to further explore my personal experiences of racism as the topic of my master's dissertation.

M.W.: I am situated in a position of privilege, as someone who doesn't experience racism. Being part of this research group has been most personally meaningful when I've experienced moments of clarity where I realised another dynamic of racism and white privilege, my own or in wider society, and I felt excited, or tense, or ashamed, on high alert. Sometimes it's been when someone has shared their personal experience of racism and I've really felt their truth land with me. Other times it has been more specific to my role in the research, like when reading comments left by my peers and realising I have been racist, as in this article where the positioning has perpetuated the centring of whiteness and the white experience. In these moments I've become aware of a painful, defensive response in myself, scared of judgement, of being bad. Sometimes I've found a path offering myself some understanding and empathy around this response, and found some resilience to stay with it and own it. It has felt pretty special to be able to own this, process together the consequences and impact on me and others, and keep going.

D.C.: Reflecting on the research process has felt to me to be to be a duoethnographic process (Lund, Norris & Sawyer, 2012). My understanding is that duoethnographic encounter brings together elements of autoethnography, autobiography, self-study, life history interviews, and more. I agree with numerous authors who have suggested that effective duoethnography exploration does not simply facilitate the retelling of the past but rather questions the meanings about those narratives and invites reconceptualisation of our past and brings about new insights into the old stories (Breault, 2016; Lund, Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Being able to have dialogue with students about race, oppression, and discrimination of diverse communities, and discussing the changes in terminology in referring to those form minority groups was a positive experience. Furthermore, open discussion of issues of privilege and power, as well as the lived experiences, of those in the group who identify as black as well as the lived experience of those who identify as white in the group informed me of ways to facilitate learning within our profession. I have experienced the group as a place of learning for myself and of challenging myself and being challenged by others and have welcomed this.

T.D.: Reading and replying to Yancy's letter was a good preamble to our racism session because it challenged me to consider an internalised racism that I had never truly acknowledged. I tried my best to reanalyse my entire life experience and I didn't like what I saw. I saw my own silence in the face of racism and also my own racist thoughts, although I had never labelled them as such. What was wrong with me that I had not only engaged in this behaviour but also not even noticed it? Within our group, conversation flowed and we spoke about different aspects of racism; and this felt good, but it often felt like we were patting ourselves on the back while condemning our classmates. This in-group, out-group dynamic reinforced how difficult it is to have conversations about racism. I could recognise within myself a fear of being in the out-group. Sometimes it didn't feel ok to not fully understand or question why something was racist or offensive. Even now I can feel myself downplaying my thoughts so as to not fall into 'not getting it'.

G.P.: Meeting with this research group has been an inspiring and overwhelmingly hopeful experience for me. It felt like a place where I could share the responsibility of trying to have difficult conversations across different positions and identities about racism, privilege, responsibility, guilt, and ultimately the possibility of change through working together. I found our meetings provoked and furthered my thinking, gave me ideas, excited me, and encouraged me to present the dilemmas about facilitating discussions about racism in counselling education in wider spheres. I have felt so discouraged and culpable for the therapy profession being part of the problem, by ignoring and perpetuating systemic racism, that I have often felt overwhelmed and hopeless about the possibilities of change. This experience has also further clarified for me the enormity of the task ahead to create an anti-racist counselling training programme and to contribute to the furtherance of an anti-racist approach in the profession and in society. Nevertheless, this research group in particular and the allyship possible within our discussions has led me to feel much more of a shared rather than individual responsibility to address these issues. It has also led to my sense that the intrapsychic experience of shame is a collective experience that unites both oppressors and oppressed and the hope that this could be a collective starting point for mutual empathic psychological understanding, to build on societal understandings of oppressive structures and ultimately to lead towards transformation.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As researcher-participants, maintaining the anonymity of authorship of the data was not always possible due to our personal relationships with each other and the other participants. Some of the post-it notes were written by members of the research team and in that event, we had an agreement that we would not disclose this. Informed consent was

provided as the cohort were given details of research involving the post-it notes at the start of the racism session. All students had formerly consented for teaching sessions to be used as research experiences during their programme. Information was also provided about the right to withdraw data until analysis began. Our wellbeing as researchers could be affected given how personal, traumatising, and retraumatising anti-racism work can be for those who experience racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). There is also the potential for 'recognition trauma' that people who experience racism, and those who do not, may go through (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2011). For those of us who do not experience racism, we are in agreement with Downes (2022), when he says that countering our white-centric universe 'requires giving up expecting the work to be comfortable' (para. 28). With this in mind, as a research group we strived to create the conditions where we could name and work with distress and discomfort as it emerged. Each of us also had in place personal therapy, which offered a space away from the group to process any distress.

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

As alluded to in some of the personal reflections above, being part of a mixed ethnicity research group meant confronting and trying to deal with the repetition of white supremacist and racist actions in the group and in how parts of the research were conducted and written up. Black members of the group had to experience, and then point out to white members of the group, some of the problematic ways they were participating in the work. Lorde (1984) describes this dynamic as 'a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought' (p. 3).

We have grappled with, and continue to grapple with, how in exploring the dynamics of racism as encountered in white individuals, we don't continue to problematically centre whiteness. We also want to avoid creating an interracial dynamic between differently racialised students, as opposed to a deepening connection between them (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005). Our thematic analysis largely explores racism, and at the level of the individual. We hope in our recommendations, drawing on this analysis, we can offer applied anti-racist suggestions that go beyond the individual to the institutional level.

The data gathered on the day of the anti-racism session was submitted anonymously. The cohort was 85% white, so we know the majority of answers will have been written by students who don't experience racism. By gathering the data without knowing the racial identity of contributors, we are at risk of silencing the voices of people who do experience racism in the group as their comments are subsumed into the majority. In an attempt to mitigate for this, we have discussed the themes that arise from this anonymised data from the perspective of someone who experiences racism and from the perspective of someone

who does not experience racism. We hope that the dialogue between these positions strengthens the work.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants experienced a large range and intensity of emotions during the anti-racism workshop, reporting feeling 'exposed', 'heaviness', and 'guilt', as well as 'gratitude', 'connection', and 'love'. As we show, the intensity and range of affect is critical in understanding how the training was successful and where its impact was limited, and in informing how anti-racist training can be carried out on the programme in future.

We conceptualise three overarching themes that participants named or spoke to before and after the session. These are defensiveness, openness, and engagement. Within each of these themes there are sub-themes that help unpack some of the complexity of the results and show the hierarchy of meaning within the data.

We consider how each theme is relevant for participants in the session who experience racism, and for those who do not. This allows us to better understand the commonalities and differences for those groups in their experience of anti-racism training. We hope this will enable us to make more specific and valuable recommendations to ensure the needs of all who participate in anti-racism training are most fully met.

### DEFENSIVENESS

The defensiveness of participants in the session was one of the main barriers to increasing understanding and awareness of racism and empowering students to think and act in anti-racist ways. One participant worries about 'slipping into a defensive response' and someone else says 'I don't want to be defensive'. It is identified as a block to their capacity to learn and as a state to try to avoid. Some participants were concerned with the defensiveness of the whole group or others within it. One student said they fear that 'people will be defensive and deny their role/part in the discussions'. Someone else hoped that 'people will be able to be honest and own the shit'. Another hoped 'we can swallow (or acknowledge) our defences'. Defensiveness is a key concern for participants who link group members' ability to work with their defences to the success of the session.

By defensiveness we mean modes of thought or behaviour, such as avoidance or denial, that help us avoid or manage the experience of challenging or intolerable negative feelings such as humiliation, guilt, or shame. Defensiveness is likely to stem from very different places depending on how participants are racialised and whether they have experienced racism or not. For people who experience racism, avoiding or denying racism exists might be

a way of denying difference and/or feeling ‘othered’, ‘dehumanised’, or ‘less than’. In asking for participants not to be defensive, a person who experiences racism may be expressing a desire for safety in the group, to be heard and accepted in their experience of racism. This could be an articulation of the hope not to hear racist ideas being expressed or to hear people who don’t experience racism minimise or deny its impact or existence, which could be painful or retraumatising. The potential for this to happen in a mixed racial group makes an anti-racism session a particularly vulnerable and exposing space.

For people who don’t experience racism, some of the mechanics of defensiveness in the context of racism are sometimes expressed as ‘white denial’, ‘white diversion’, or ‘white fragility’ (DiAngelo, 2018). White denial is when the realities of white privilege and racialised inequality are either played down or entirely discounted. An example of white denial is ‘focusing on very successful black people as a way of saying, look, they made it, therefore there isn’t racial inequality’ (Lowery, 2020, para. 12). The fear one student voices ‘that people will excuse themselves from the conversation for being white’ brings this into focus for our group. This student is overtly concerned that white participants won’t acknowledge the way their privilege and white supremacy impacts on people of colour. It also points to a concern about the way that whiteness is normalised or constructed as outside of race, while minority identities are ‘othered’. For those that don’t experience racism it is very easy to simply check out from the conversation, while the spotlight is placed on those who do, potentially with an expectation to share and teach for the benefit of the majority.

Another way denial is enacted is when someone who doesn’t experience racism highlights the hardships they faced *too* in response to hearing about racism. This is a way of minimising or denying that racialised discrimination is of particular significance or that they benefit from white supremacy. This is exemplified by the participant in our group who fears ‘being othered or dismissed because of being part of a white minority’. This is not to deny that some white identities face discrimination, but to notice how raising it is used to side-step taking responsibility for racism and privilege.

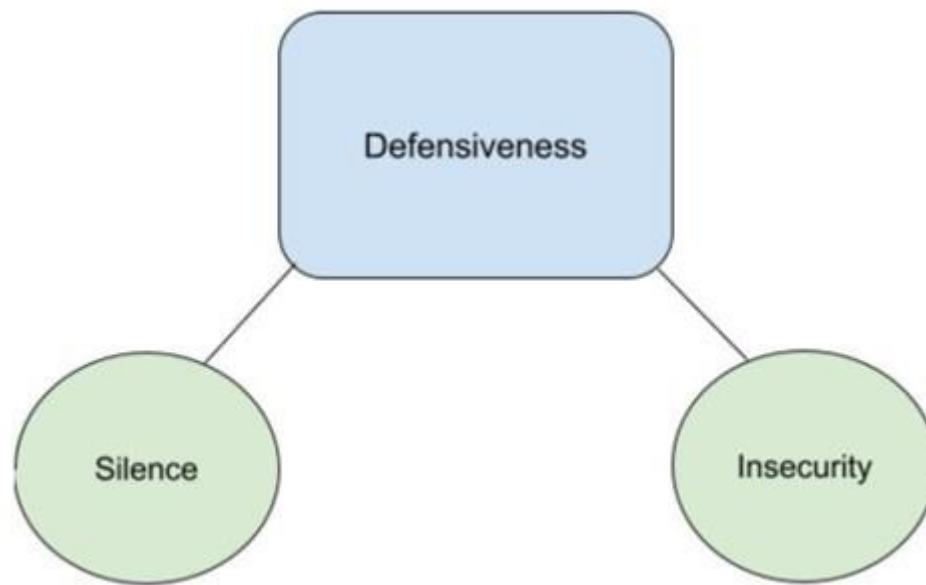
Harris (2018), when discussing racism in New Zealand, explains white diversion: ‘This is where, in instances in which facts about racism or colonisation are raised, the conversation is derailed through a claim that Māori themselves are guilty of some other wrong’ (para. 25). It is similar to racist avoidance, which could be any behaviour that allows someone to avoid thinking about racism, feeling its impact, or confronting it. An example of this might be saying, or genuinely believing, that you ‘don’t see skin colour’. One participant showed awareness of this dynamic by hoping simply to ‘not avoid’. The students who hoped for ‘no drama/fallout’ and that ‘we can learn to talk about race/racism without offence being taken’ can be understood to be hoping that the whole group avoids hearing anything controversial, challenging, or painful—that the group stays ‘emotionally safe’ or sanitises the exploration of racism. The person that hoped for a ‘judgement free space (not optimistic)’ and another who wanted ‘to hear other people speak who may share similar

views to me' also can be seen as avoidant; shying away from confronting some of the more challenging dynamics in anti-racist work. If written by a student who experiences racism, this avoidance takes on a different tone, perhaps hoping not to hear racist ideas expressed in the session and wanting to feel allyship from other participants. The reasons a white student may want to avoid offence being taken in comparison to a student of colour wanting a judgement-free space really highlights the differing power dynamics between these two cohorts and the contrasting levels of vulnerability involved in participating in the session. One is not hoping their self-concept as a 'good' person to be exposed or challenged, while the other is hoping not to experience familiar discrimination.

DiAngelo's (2018) concept of white fragility has come to mainstream prominence, and encapsulates many of the above defensive responses. She explains it like this:

It's the defensive reactions so many white people have when our racial worldviews, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged. For a lot of white people, just suggesting that being white has meaning will trigger a deep, defensive response. And that defensiveness serves to maintain both our comfort and our positions in a racially inequitable society from which we benefit. (DiAngelo, 2018b, p. 1)

This is directly spoken to by a participant in the session who said they were still stuck on 'accepting my white privilege', while someone else mentions the 'layers that act as a barrier to me seeing my privilege'. Another participant overtly states 'I need to work on my defences as I can feel them heightened and it's stopping me moving forward'. If they do not experience racism, we can understand them to mean that they are in contact with their blocks around thinking or behaving in anti-racist ways, i.e., their white fragility.

**Figure 2. Theme 1—Defensiveness***Insecurity*

The sub-theme of insecurity is apparent in the number of participants worried about ‘getting things wrong’ in some form or another. By insecurity we mean the relational experience of fear or discomfort that we are in some way not acceptable to ourselves or others, which often leads to defensive reactions. Participants worried about ‘saying the wrong thing’, ‘being wrong’, ‘feeling unknowledgeable or offending someone’, ‘accidentally making someone feel uncomfortable/distressed’, and ‘offending/upsetting others’. A core fear that underlies these insecurities is vocalised by the student who mentioned their stuckness around ‘not wanting to feel like I’m a bad person’. Here we see how denial and avoidance of racism are go-to responses to preserve a sense of being ‘good’ for fear of being implicated in being responsible for racism. For someone experiencing racism, a cause of insecurity might be that peers won’t be able to accept them and stay grounded when they share their experience of racism within or outside the group, or bring any divergent opinions to the group.

The preoccupation of many in the group on causing offence or being perceived as stupid or ignorant suggests a lack of familiarity in engaging with anti-racism work or discussing racism. It also suggests a lack of knowledge or conceptual understanding of racism itself. This is highlighted by the student who is scared they might ‘discover that I have both an unconscious or even conscious racist response’. Their desire to be blameless, or ‘not racist’, implies they have not understood how structural racism, racial inequality, and white supremacy impact on their own and all of our consciousnesses, or that they will be making

racist and anti-racist actions all the time, as the following quote illustrates. ““Racist” and “anti-racist” are like peelable nametags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting or expressing each moment. These are not permanent tattoos’ (Kendi, 2019, p. 23).

A number of students feared ‘being misunderstood’. If these comments were made by students who don’t experience racism, it suggests a lack of confidence, perhaps alongside a skill and knowledge deficit, in how to appropriately and sensitively speak about racism. They aren’t confident they have the vocabulary or skill to articulate themselves in a way that isn’t racist or perceived as racist. This fear of judgement, humiliation, and blame from peers is acknowledged overtly by participants who are scared the session will involve ‘shame’, ‘shaming and blaming’, and ‘confrontation.’ Another person sets their goal as being to ‘keep challenging the fear I feel about acknowledging my own internalised racism’, that is, to overcome their insecurity of blame, negative self-judgement, or shame in order to better enact anti-racist thought and behaviour. For students who experience racism, being misunderstood, confrontation, shame, or blame may tie back into a fear that their experiences or contributions will be met with denial or hostility by those in the group who do not experience racism. They might have to find the inner resources to both witness and confront ‘white fragility’. For all, this fear of judgement, or ‘getting it wrong’, goes some way to explaining why some individuals did not speak during the session, and why silence is so important to understanding how to run impactful anti-racist training.

### *Silence*

Silence and its opposites—speech, participation, and conversation—are a significant sub-theme in our analysis. Someone at the beginning of the session identified they wanted ‘to feel more confident to talk about race’. Another student raises it at the end of the session, still stuck on ‘how to speak up’ while someone else states their next step is simply to ‘talk’. Members of the group were aware, to differing degrees, of how silence would impact the success of the session and their own learning, as well as the role silence plays in perpetuating racism. The reasons for participating or staying silent are likely to be different for people who experience racism in contrast to those who do not. Barbara Applebaum (2016) states ‘white silence around race shelters white ignorance *and* innocence and thereby operates, often unwittingly, to maintain white supremacy’ (p. 391). The participant who said ‘I feel very conflicted about those in the group who stayed silent. Frustrated by them, and also interested in why they didn’t speak’ gives insight into how silence puts the emphasis on the experience of the silent. Silence has impact, leading to frustration but also a void, a question, an emptiness. We don’t know why people don’t speak and we don’t know what they feel or believe. What we do know is that irrespective of racial identity, in not speaking up or out, silence perpetuates a racist status quo.



The need, desire, or expectation to contribute directly brought participants into contact with their defensiveness and insecurity, as shown by the student who feared 'feeling pressured to speak' and another who was scared 'I won't feel comfortable to voice my opinion'. Someone simply wondered 'whether we will be able to talk about it'. If expressed by someone who experiences racism who was in the session, we can understand this as expressing a hope for conversation, alongside a fear about sharing experiences of racism in a majority white group. People who experience racism need the space to process and explore their experiences, but to do so is exposing. In this case silence may be used as a defensive strategy. Silence may seem like a viable option to avoid causing ruptures in the status quo of the group as well as a way to avoid drawing more attention to the racial difference between peers. At the same time, silence can be alienating and painful for people who experience racism. They may feel pressured to carry the burden of the discussion on their own.

If articulated by students who don't experience racism, we can understand silence as being linked to and a function of racist defensiveness. Case and Hemmings (2005) describe white silence as a distancing strategy, a defence, that white students use to preserve their position as 'good whites'. Even once silence has been understood as a racist strategy, it doesn't mean individuals find it within themselves to speak. Indeed, this understanding may heighten insecurity. The person who says 'I wish I'd shared more about how I was feeling at the time' highlights this inner struggle. Silence remains a form of avoidance; a freeze response to that painful idea that, whether we experience racism or not, we are part of and implicated in a racist system.

One student was scared of 'not saying anything at all'. They are aware speech and participation are necessary in anti-racist work, but are unsure they or the group will overcome its blocks and defences. This is in contrast to the many participants who hoped for or anticipated variations on 'open conversation', 'powerful discussions', or 'heated debate'. The extent to which this was achieved in the session is a good indicator of the extent to which the session was successful. One person felt 'liberated because of the openness of the conversation', while, more modestly, another thought there was 'some success in sharing in the group'. Contrastingly, another participant said there was 'a long way to go towards a full conversation about race'. The group's judgements as to how well silence was overcome seem diverse. These differing assessments point to different levels of expectations, learning having been achieved, and differing conceptualisations about what a successful session would look like.

## OPENNESS

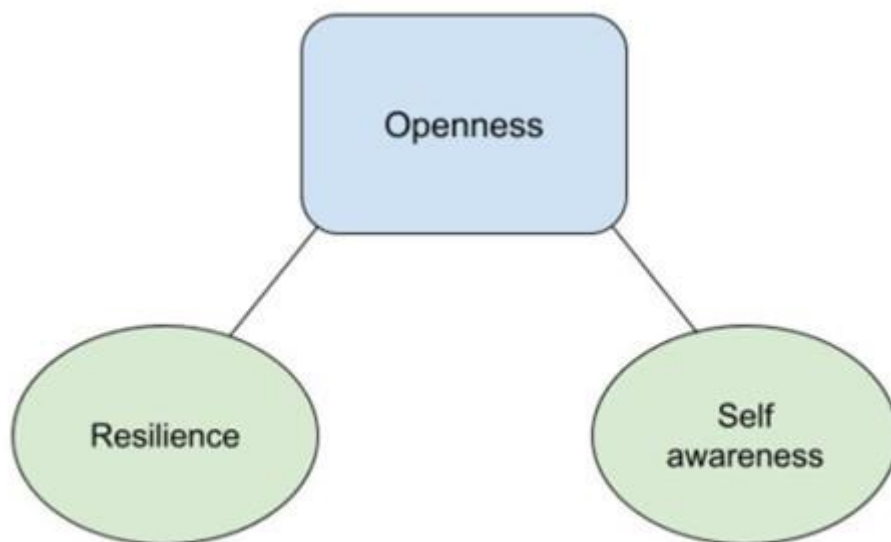
Our analysis finds openness to be a central theme, and the degree to which it was achieved by participants is an indication of the effectiveness or impact of the training. The session challenged participants to be open, both with one another and themselves. Someone worried 'I will not be as open as I can be'. Others hoped 'to hear real honesty and be honest' and that 'we can all speak honestly and openly'. We understand openness to mean having the awareness to congruently notice what we are experiencing, to examine our implicit and explicit values and beliefs, and to observe how we relate to ourselves and others and to communicate some of this.

Once again, openness has different significance for participants who experience racism and those who do not. Will participants who experience racism be received by those who don't if they are open with their ideas, feelings, and experiences? Will they be able to stay open to hearing people who don't experience racism articulate themselves? Will people who don't experience racism be open to admitting or acknowledging their privilege and ways they benefit from and contribute to racism in society? Will people who experience racism gain anything themselves from their openness in this context, or just feel used to educate others?

Reflecting on the session, someone says they think 'the group has been relatively open about race as a subject' while another person says they feel 'liberated in some respect because of the openness of the conversation'. Both students identify openness as a progressive quality of the discussion, and both qualify their sense of the extent to which it was achieved by saying 'relatively' and 'in some respect'.

Openness has a two-person relational quality involving an expressive and receptive dimension. It encompasses honestly expressing ourselves to others, and being receptive to hearing and understanding others views and experiences. The participant who hoped for 'open honest conversations that will challenge me and develop my awareness' is leaning right into this dynamic aspect of openness. They highlight difficult self-enquiry and learning as well as pointing back to discourse and involvement as a critical mechanic of how anti-racist work can be effective.

Our analysis of openness highlights the sub-themes of resilience and self-awareness as interlinking attributes that participants in anti-racism training need in order to learn and develop anti-racist thinking and behaviours. Self-awareness isn't possible without the capacity to examine oneself even if what we find is painful or fails to match our existing self-concept. Resilience is a way of describing the attributes that allow us to do this, as well as to hear feedback, or to hear about others' experiences that give rise to uncomfortable or painful feelings. The aspiration of one student to 'continue to be open to learn from my mistakes' speaks to their willingness to assess and take responsibility for their past actions and then adjust their behaviour, exemplifying exactly this dynamic.

**Figure 3. Theme 2—Openness**

### *Resilience*

The session challenged many participants to be more emotionally resilient when engaging with their own racism and anti-racist work. By resilience we mean the capacity to stay in a well-regulated, open, congruent state when potentially stimulating, painful, or challenging ideas or feedback are being offered. Resilience can be contrasted to white fragility where the suggestion of benefitting from a white identity leads to a shutting down or defensive ‘fight’ response.

For people who experience racism, resilience takes on another dimension. It speaks to the ability to function in a systematically racist world, coping with microaggressions and explicit discrimination. In a session such as this one, it involves navigating triggers around past trauma and stretching to listening to and educating peers who don’t experience racism. For people who experience racism, permission not to be resilient, but to be witnessed and heard in painful or defensive reactions could be an important part of the encounter work such a group does.

Resilience is sometimes understood as including the capacity to ‘bounce back’ from adversity or to ‘positively adapt’ following a challenge (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). The participants who say they want to ‘keep challenging the fear I feel about acknowledging my own internalised racism’, ‘to be more open to addressing racist tendencies in me despite discomfort’, and be ‘able to face myself’ are all identifying their need to be resilient if they are to enact anti-racism in their lives. Another participant shows their awareness of their

lack of resilience, saying ‘it’s too hard to constantly reflect on racism’, and, assuming they do not experience racism, also neatly demonstrates white privilege in the ease there is in making that choice. This is another aspect of the dynamics of power in this work where people who experience racism have no choice but to engage with this experience emotionally, whereas people who don’t experience racism have a much greater choice to avoid the subject and the consequent discomfort entirely.

### *Self-awareness*

Self-awareness refers to the capacity of becoming the object of one’s own attention (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). In this state one actively identifies, processes, and stores information about the self (Morin, 2011). Being prepared to look inward and develop self-awareness of unconscious biases, prejudices, and racist beliefs is central to the process of people who don’t experience racism developing an awareness of white privilege and of white racial identity. People who experience racism can also internalise and perpetuate racist ideas and biases, which can be harmful to themselves and others (Kendi, 2019). Ideally, this session aims to be a place where all participants can consider this in relation to their own experiences.

We found participants in the training frequently mentioned increasing their awareness and self-awareness. Sometimes participants challenged themselves to acknowledge their own racism. One wrote that they wanted to ‘keep being aware of internal racism/bias’, while another said they wanted ‘to be more aware of racist tendencies’. Another student mentions awareness in the context of defensiveness, wanting to ‘be aware of my defences’, linking defensiveness to their capacity to challenge their racist actions or ideas. For someone who experiences racism, this may link back to a desire not to react defensively to their peers who don’t experience racism.

For some, the session lacked this quality. One person commented ‘I feel like we’ve not really rolled our sleeves up and got into it, not owning stuff as much as we could, not challenging ourselves or looking inward’. Each individual’s capacity or openness to broaden their self-awareness will change and differ, so how anti-racist training accommodates students’ different levels of resilience or understanding will to some extent define how effective it is.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

Many students reported being galvanised to keep engaging with anti-racism after the session. One participant says this is ‘continuous, not a one off!’. Another that they feel

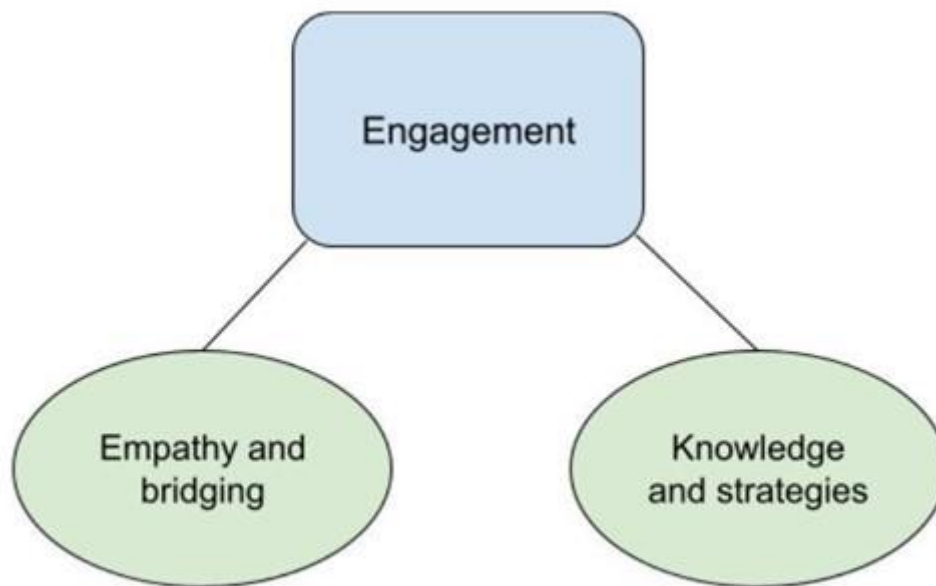
'motivated and inspired to learn more'. Others say they will 'keep talking openly about racism' and that they feel 'empowered to not be neutral'. Students also named factors that inhibit them from continuing to engage. One names their insecurity, 'still stuck in fearing getting it wrong, though silence feels like the "most wrong" answer'. Another is confused and feels ill-equipped, asking 'What can I do? As a therapist but also as a white person of privilege where do I go from here?' and someone else names their sense of disempowerment, 'the issue of racism feels really big and overwhelming'.

Our analysis shows that the group's focus in terms of their future engagement with anti-racist work is divided between a commitment to continuing to develop self-awareness and resilience, the 'hope to become ever more comfortable within my discomfort', a willingness to empathise and bridge (Givens, 2021), 'to learn more about others' experiences to increase awareness', and a commitment to deepen knowledge about racism and learn the strategies to combat it 'to ensure I do continued reading', and 'develop knowledge and awareness'.

Staying engaged, or as DiAngelo (2018) terms it, having 'racial stamina', is necessary for those who do not experience racism to remain open to learning and growth. While openness, resilience, and self-awareness are all necessary for people who don't experience racism to start to challenge their racial privilege, they are not enough in and of themselves. 'White privilege' allows and enables people who don't experience racism to turn away from confronting it. People who don't experience racism have to engage, and stay engaged, in order to do this work and in order to make more than a tokenistic difference. As Saad (2022) puts it when exploring what it would mean to lose white privilege, it means 'continuing to show up, even when you are called out, you feel discomfort or fatigue, or you are not rewarded for it (socially or financially)' (p. 108).

For people who experience racism, engagement might mean seeking out opportunities for healing around racial trauma. This could be through being heard and validated in their experience of racism and its impact on them. It might be through learning approaches or finding tools to manage and respond to racism in a way that serves them, and that help maintain a centredness in the face of racism (Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture, 2015). This could take the form of a racial trauma response plan or developing daily practices to help in the face of racism. Engagement could also mean participating in anti-racism activism.

Our analysis shines some light on what factors help motivate students to engage in anti-racist struggle, as well as the dynamics that led to students turning away from the work. We see this in our sub-themes of empathy and bridging, and knowledge and strategies.

**Figure 4. Theme 3—Engagement**

### *Knowledge and strategies*

Some students directly named their need to learn more and their current lack of knowledge or understanding about racism, ‘I still need to do more reading as I don’t think I am fully aware of all issues around race’. One participant showed their lack of knowledge through the use of racist language: ‘How to challenge my awareness further when with a coloured client’, as well as acknowledging the need to broaden their self-awareness, even if they still don’t know how to do this. Others feel inhibited as they aren’t well versed in specific skills or strategies: ‘How do I work with ethnic minority clients in the therapy room?’, or stating they feel ‘helpless in how I can help change occur’. Irrespective of racial identity or the experience of racism, a lack of knowledge about racism and helplessness around change processes blocks engagement.

In contrast to this, others found the session had increased their knowledge. Quotes included: ‘Feeling more positive—understanding what I can do to challenge racism’, ‘guilt but empowered to not be neutral’, and ‘empowered with information’. The better a conceptual understanding students have of white privilege and racism, as well as learning more concrete strategies to act and think in anti-racist ways, the more empowered and motivated they seem to be to stay engaged. There is a question as to what this empowerment of people who don’t experience racism would mean for people who do, or indeed who has empowered them, but it does seem to describe a coming out of a defensive attitude to starting to take responsibility (which accompanies power, see Proctor, 2017).

### *Empathy and bridging*

For those that do not experience racism, having an understanding of racism, growing one's self-awareness, developing a white racial identity, and learning some anti-racist strategies does not necessarily stop the 'othering' or dehumanising of people of colour. People who don't experience racism giving space to and empathising with the experiences of people who do is a mechanism that allows 'bridging', 'reaching across to other groups and towards our inherent, shared humanity and connection, while recognising that we have differences' (powell, 2017, para. 17). Lorde (1984) says:

Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only within that interdependency of difference strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (p. 110)

This is recognised, and felt, by some in the cohort in the workshop. One person says they are 'grateful for the powerful impact of hearing personal experiences as opposed to reading articles'. Another sees giving this space as a key strategy in their anti-racism work, 'take home message to really give space, time, and energy to listening to minority experiences, and approaching and making space for discussing racism'. Someone else recognises their personal responsibility to bridge, saying 'In the group I want to be brave enough to find out more about the experience of those different to me in terms of ethnicity and culture (everyone's)'.

Bridging involves creating and holding an empathic space. It is about a deep listening and a recognition of suffering. For people who experience racism it is a chance to be heard, understood, and seen. The primary function is not to educate others in the group, but to offer a space for acknowledgement, trust building, and connection. It also affords the chance to understand some of the dynamics existing for people who don't experience racism; insight that has the potential to be empowering and connecting.

However, if the empathy of people who don't experience racism for those who experience racism isn't coupled with resilience, it can give rise to an overwhelming cycle of guilt and shame. This can re-centre the white experience and continue to marginalise the experience of others. One student writes that they are 'still fearful, but trying to get past that. I don't want to wallow in my privilege', acknowledging the way that their fear keeps them stuck in a defensive, self-centring mode. White identified people can become confused and stuck about how to take responsibility for participating in and benefitting from a racist system. This can lead back to defensiveness, denial, or avoidance as a way of preserving their sense of being a good person. This seems to be borne out by the people who said, 'I fear it's too hard to constantly reflect upon racism' and 'the issue of racism feels

really big and overwhelming', on the assumption that those comments were made by people who don't experience racism. If made by people who do experience racism, we can understand them as a desire to find safety in not having to confront or be in touch with difficult feelings or trauma around their experiences.

Menakem (2017) writes, 'we cannot individualize our way out of white-body supremacy. Nor can we merely strategize our way out. We need collective action—action that heals' (p. 213). Collective action offers opportunities for empathy and bridging, a space to build the confidence to enact anti-racist acts and ideas. We've seen here that the more empowered students are, the more likely they are to engage ongoingly with anti-racist work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Calls for multicultural approaches to counselling training (Locke & Kiselica, 1999) and training on multicultural counselling competence (Sue et al., 1982) have existed for some time, but can be easily contained into a single 'equality and diversity' module within a training programme, a non-performativity that can often reinforce rather than challenge white supremacy (Ahmed, 2012). Freire (1968/2017) and hooks (1994) have long offered postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric and hegemonic education practices, while contemporary anti-racist education in Britain and the USA criticises the liberal assumptions of multiculturalism by uncovering and dismantling the hidden power structures that are responsible for inequality and racism in institutions. In 2014, as part of a reenergised decolonising movement, students at University College London mounted a campaign asking, 'Why Is my curriculum White?', expressing their anger and frustration at 'the lack of awareness that the curriculum is white, comprised of "white ideas" by "white authors" and is a result of colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible' (Peters, 2015, p. 641). With Downes and Taylor (2021), we can imagine 'a curriculum that is informed by various branches of critical theory and related practices that embrace and recognise Black and brown subjectivities while decommissioning whiteness' (p. 89). It is in this spirit that we would like the learnings from this article to be applied. We believe this University's counselling and psychotherapy course has the potential to be part of dislodging whiteness. Within psychotherapeutic methodologies we are handed the tools to individually and institutionally practice anti-racism (see Proctor, 2022). Here, we make some recommendations that arise from our research that could be applied specifically to the programme we are referring to, with the hope they will be of some general use to other training programmes or educational anti-racist endeavours.



### *Reimagining the curriculum*

A fourth wave of anti-racist work focuses on how to eradicate the subtle and pernicious prevalence of racism in a society where, broadly, an institutional and public position of racial equality is endorsed. Part of understanding this is in recognising that ‘the unconscious mind is partially the source of today’s new order of racial discrimination and bias’ (powell, 2015, para. 5). Dual-process theories (Strack & Deutsch, 2004) in psychology suggest that implicit and explicit processes are supported by fundamentally different psychological systems, and that the implicit system is highly contextual and only changes in an enduring way after considerable time, effort, and/or intensity of experience. In terms of anti-racist work then, this explains why a ‘one-shot’ or single session method is unlikely to meaningfully bring about change (Devine et al., 2012). It tells us that in the design of this psychotherapy training, anti-racist work needs to be persistent and regular in order to have impact; the entire curriculum needs decolonisation. One way to achieve this is through integrating that work into a wide range of teaching modules. Psychotherapy is perfectly situated to do this given how widely accepted and evidenced it is, across modalities, that the person of the therapist, their being and presence, contributes to clients’ improvement beyond the intervention. As such, psychotherapy training is almost universally geared towards guiding and supporting the personal development of prospective therapists, through reflective writing, personal development groups, and unstructured group time. These are fertile spaces for integrating anti-racism work. Below are a few specific examples of parts of the curriculum in which this could be done.

Our research points to an opportunity to integrate anti-racism work into the teaching of psychodynamic theory. We have shown how important addressing ‘defensive processes’ (McWilliams, 2011) such as denial, repression, and displacement is in the anti-racist work of people who don’t experience racism. We know that unconscious, implicit biases are powerful determinants of behaviour precisely because people lack personal awareness of them (Dovidio et al., 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). It is also well documented that they can occur despite conscious non prejudiced attitudes or intentions. The bringing into awareness of, and working with, unconscious processes and implicit bias via something such as the multifaceted prejudice habit-breaking intervention devised by Devine et al. (2012) could be integrated into the module.

Similarly, the module on intersubjective development is well placed to offer space for personal exploration of the origins of our racial identities, and how our understanding of those differently positioned from ourselves is limited. For students who experience racism, such consideration might help in acknowledging and validating experiences of racism and recognising the emotional toll it may take. It could facilitate work on how to navigate and cope with racialised experiences. Downes (2022) writes, ‘Developing the capacity to “mentalize whilst white” is key to our work otherwise we continue to do harm and limit the potential of the therapeutic project’ (para. 11). For students who do not experience racism,

understanding intersubjective development offers an opportunity to notice how their whiteness was constructed, and begin or continue the work of acknowledging internalised biases.

When the teaching focus is on trauma-informed psychotherapy and somatic approaches that focus on the mind–body connection, acknowledging and foregrounding work around racialised trauma is essential (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Fanon, 1961). Menakem (2017) writes, ‘we will never outgrow white-body supremacy just through discussion, training, or anything else that’s mostly cognitive. Instead, we need to look to the body—and to the embodied experience of trauma’ (p. 43). Drawing on polyvagal theory (Porges, 2003) to understand how racialised trauma is stored, and considering the impact of intergenerational racialised trauma (Hankerson et al., 2022), allows a much needed focus shift to the experiences of students who do experience racism.

If the normativity of whiteness is disrupted enough then we see it for what it is, a lie that serves as a strategy of domination with nothing remotely authentic about it. There is no transformation of bad whiteness into good whiteness—a return to our humanity is what is on offer, with a view to ceasing the violence of racism. (Downes, 2022, para. 16)

Downes’ statement is a call for those who don’t experience racism to see through the construct of whiteness and all it entails, and to drop into their humanity, an idea echoed by therapist and social worker Carlos Hoyt (2016): ‘The only people who qualify as non-racist are those who defy and denounce the false logic of race altogether’ (para. 4). This speaks to the person-centred emphasis on presence, and congruence, the ‘accurate matching of experience with awareness’ (Rogers, 1961, p. 282), linking closely to our themes of openness and self-awareness. Inviting students to notice ‘what is true about ourselves?’, to question and deconstruct racialised identities, to notice our biases, means teaching around core person-centred concepts can be part of integrating and normalising anti-racist work into the curriculum. Including teaching on Ubuntu philosophy, which argues that all students and colleagues can excel if their humanity is placed at the centre of their learning and if they feel a sense of belonging (Ukpokodu, 2016), and considering its application to therapy (Qangule, 2019; Van Dyk & Nefale, 2005) would offer complimentary and contrasting ideas to a Rogerian approach.

Empathy, understood as a combination of affective matching, other-oriented perspective-taking, and self–other differentiation (Coplan, 2011) offers the potential to give us first-person understanding of each other’s experiences and perspectives. As discussed above, fine tuning our capacity for empathy is key to bridging, and staying engaged to work on anti-racism. Opening radical spaces in the classroom where we hold one another in empathy around racialised pain offers a beautiful possibility to move towards contact, bridging, and realising shared goals around accountability and allyship.

### *Creating safety for students who experience racism*

A challenge for all anti-racism training is how to make sure the training is meaningful and valuable for participants who experience racism as well as those who do not. Insecurity is a theme from our analysis that indicates the need for anti-racism training to actively work to create a space of emotional safety for participants. In attachment terms, the training can offer a 'secure base' from which openness, resilience, and self-awareness can develop. Students who experience racism are quite likely to experience racism during the session, or may find the topic triggering, especially when working on the topic in a majority white group. It may be painful to realise how little understanding of their lived experience people who don't experience racism have.

To avoid repeating the patterns that exist in wider society, anti-racism training should be designed to prioritise the feelings and needs of people that experience racism rather than it falling on them to educate their peers. With this in mind, acknowledging how differently racially positioned members of the cohort are, and therefore how differently challenging the session will be is important. One suggestion might be to try contracting at the beginning of a session to establish the roles and expectations participants will take on. This could create the safe container for this topic that students who experience racism really need. The session could also begin with two separate groups, one for students who experience racism and one for those who don't, starting by understanding commonalities and feel allyship, before moving to a mixed group to aim to understand across difference.

### *Our reflections on creating safety for students who don't experience racism*

There was a strong sense of willingness from some participants to learn more about minoritised cultures and to more deeply acknowledge their racism. Anti-racism training needs to be designed in such a way that an environment is created that offers enough safety for students who don't experience racism to be able to accept their 'white privilege' and allow into their self-concept an acknowledgment of their racism. At the same time, they need to be offered the opportunity to find, grow, and develop a strong white anti-racist identity. The course needs to help students develop the security to be able to accommodate the both/and of being both racist and anti-racist.

Silence and awkwardness when communicating about race were frequently mentioned in the data. It's clear that participants are not comfortable or used to talking about racism and anti-racism. We also saw that a sense of confusion or uncertainty about next steps or how to practically effect change was present for some participants. Many may not have the confidence, vocabulary, or ideas to challenge racism when we hear or see it, and may not know how to respond to or support someone who has experienced racism both in the moment of discrimination or more widely. A specific focus on what to communicate and

what not to communicate, and the opportunity to practise this communication in a safe environment would give participants a concrete takeaway from a session.

## CONCLUSION

Counselling courses have the potential to be at the forefront of efforts to decolonise the curriculum and to put in place visionary programmes for exploring our racialised identities, deconstructing them, and creating an anti-racist praxis. Counselling courses must create the fertile conditions which allow for real openness, self-reflection, and resilience in their participants in order for anti-racist work to succeed. They need to offer continuous opportunities to engage on issues of race in an empathic, embodied, and collective way. They need to offer knowledge and strategies both for people who do and people who do not experience racism, to think and act in anti-racist ways. Courses need to create equal space for the needs of minoritised students (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005), for example, giving students who experience racism the opportunity to reflect on how to improve their counselling of clients who do not, rather than simply the reverse (Rooney et al., 1998). Courses need to allow students who experience racism separate spaces to meet in, and make sure those spaces are well supported. Programmes need to integrate non-Western traditions and perspectives on psychotherapy, including thinkers from outside the Eurocentric canon. Perhaps then, the profession of counselling psychotherapy and professional training can be more congruent with the hopes of many of us who enter this profession; to challenge inequalities and work towards social justice.

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