The importance of diversity and inclusion within the research supervision relationship: the views of research students and supervisors, by Sofie Bager-Charleson, Alistair McBeath, Divine Charura and Clare Symons

NB! Unedited draft. For full article please go to: ***Bager-Charleson, S,, McBeath, A., Charura, D, & Symons, C. (2024) Diversity and Inclusion within doctoral Research supervision. CPR, Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Journal, First published June 2024 (early view). https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/capr.12776***

Abstract

Research supervisors are uniquely positioned to recognise student abilities and needs. This mixed methods study explores how research supervision can support counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology doctoral students in their development of new knowledge, with diversity related opportunities and challenges in mind. Guided by 'dialectical pragmatism' we used a semi-qualitative online survey, Reflective Online Practitioner Survey (ROPS), (McBeath 2020) with closed and open questions disseminated across learning institutes in the UK, Europe, and North America. The survey received 105 responses with 45 coming from research supervisors and 60 from research students. Only a minority considered their own research supervision team to be diverse and two-thirds of respondents did not see matters relating to diversity and inclusion receiving sufficient emphasis in published research. Both our quantitative and qualitative data addressed unequal representations in terms of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and heritage, (dis-)ability and social class – several referring to a 'history of domination by white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives'. Many described 'diversity being left out of research' with consequences on the capacity to meet clients' need in clinical practice. As one said: 'we need to decolonise the training material by critically analysing and situating knowledge and calling out missing voices'. Another stated: "If the research we conduct and draw on as practitioners cannot actively reckon with oppression within…we risk furthering the violence that marginalised clients, practitioners, and researchers face". Support and training of supervisors to address diversity and power in research from the start of supervision were argued as essential, with both the supervisory relationship and innovative epistemological angles to knowledge and 'reality' in the field of mental health in mind.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, Research Supervision, Research student, Epistemic violence, Decolonisation, Lived Experience research

Introduction

The research supervision relationship is often regarded as being a critical factor for those involved in doctoral research, yet it is seldom the subject of systematic research. This study explores research supervision with diversity related (including socio-cultural, disability, gender and sexuality) obstacles and opportunities in mind. The research focused on both research

students and research supervisors and, following a mixed methods design, allowed both prevalence and lived experiences to be captured.

A note on language and terminology

As we are aware of the fast-evolving nature in language relating to difference and diversity concepts, we foreground our intentionality to use terminology that conveys our reflective depth and the importance of using language sensitively, and appropriately, to avoid repetition of othering. Where we are referring to direct quotes from the data.

Positioning ourselves in the study

As a team researching diversity within doctoral research supervision, we have considered both individually and collectively our own personal and professional positioning. This includes considering how our own identities bring experiences of diversity and intersectionality (or not) to the forefront. We adhere to Clemons (2019) assertion about that "researchers must answer personally and professionally: "what's my investment in this research?" [and]"what is the work my soul must have?" to communicate what we regard as our strengths and limitations when it comes to considering diversity, inclusion and the potential for othering, particularly in relation to this project with our own lived experience of diversity in mind.

Sofie describes herself as a Swedish cisgender female researcher within a traditionally male dominated field. She brings special interests in qualitative research-driven questions into personal and socio-cultural dimensions to meaning-makings and experiences in the field of mental health. She brings her own lived experience and interest in multilingualism (Bager-Charleson & Kasap 2017) and in living with (dis-)ability (Bager-Charleson 2010). She is the founder of the research group Therapists as Research-informed Practitioner, at the Metanoia Institute and as Senior Research Fellow at City, University of London. She has conducted research to provide learning and professional development, support best-practice developments, and make policy recommendations to promote effective and sustainable research training for therapists.

Alistair describes himself as a Scottish practitioner-researcher who is committed to making research and academic writing more accessible to everyday practitioners. He brings a background as a quantitative researcher before training at Regent's College and Guy's hospital in existential and psychodynamic therapy and in qualitative research. Since then, he has been interested in negotiating and bridging these often-polarised research approaches. He is a long-standing research supervisor at the Metanoia Institute and the New School of Psychotherapy

and Counselling. He works for an Edinburgh-based therapeutic consultancy, publishes regularly and has enjoyed combining quantitative and qualitative research books published about research and research methods within counselling and psychotherapy.

Divine describes himself as a Black British man of African heritage who brings an awareness from both personal and professional perspectives of the impact of discrimination, oppression and othering. Divine is a Professor of Counselling Psychology, and the Programme director for the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at York St. John University. He is also a practitioner psychologist and coaching psychologist with an interest in research and practice which values difference, diversity and our uniqueness as human beings through our journeys of always 'be-ing-becoming' and continually being in process [ontological dynamism]. In line with this, Divine values the importance of self-reflection, regarding matters of diversity and inclusion in supervision. Divine's current research focuses on trauma and mental health across the lifespan, and he has been a principal investigator on funded research projects as well as been chairing the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy Research working group for a few years.

Clare describes herself as a white, middle-aged, cisgender heterosexual woman, with no current health issues or disability, now middle class and from working class Irish/British origins. She has undertaken some supervision of counselling and psychotherapy doctoral students while previously working at a UK university. As the Head of Research for the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) she is actively involved in commissioning and supporting research. She values equality and diversity within the field, as well as pushing for greater co-creation and the fully integrated involvement of people with lived experience within research.

Research supervision literature.

Whilst *clinical* supervision is a well-explored area, *research* supervision remains relatively under-theorised in counselling and psychotherapy. Our narrative literature search has led into other disciplines, including education, social work, nursing and geography which like psychotherapy often balances arts with science. Research supervision was typically described as central for student progression and welfare (Akerlind & McAlpine 2017; Armsby, Costley & Cranfield 2018; Bingham & Durán-Palma 2014; Bruce, & Stoodley 2013; Erikson 2019; Lee 2018; McKenna 2017; Punch, & Graham 2017; Nasiri, & Mafakheri 2015; Roach, Christensen & Rieger 2019; Bager-Charleson & McBeath 2021). Roach et al (2019) refer, for instance, to research supervision as the 'most important determinant' of successful and timely

postgraduate degree completion. Despite this, studies highlight how institutional guidelines for supervision remain scarce (Lee 2018; Taylor 2019; Erikson 2019). Recently started projects, like the RSVP (the Next Generation Research SuperVision Project) makes welcomed exceptions, aiming 'to transform research supervision culture and practice [through research into] what works in different contexts, identify what effective supervision practice looks and feels like, and determine how supervision practice is both supported and rewarded' (https://www.rsvp.ac.uk/).

Of particular interest to this study is the increasing amount of research (Adams-Hutcheson & Johnston 2019; Collins 2020; Clemons 2019; Charura & Lago 2021; Charura & Wicaksono 2022; Maistry 2017; McKenna 2017; Barton 2020 and Malan, Erwee, van Rensburg & Danaher 2012; Boelman, Bell & Harne 2021; Kahya, H.H, 2023) that address how the differences in socio-cultural background, (dis-)ability, age, gender and sexual orientation are shown to have an effect on doctoral candidates' progress and successful completion.

Adams-Hutcheson & Johnston (2019) focus, for instance, on 'feminist geographies of care and mentoring' and argue for supervision 'based on care, mentoring and friendship [to] survive and deflect structural inequalities' across undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate and early career stages at university. Their study offers examples of 'joint supervision and research [to] illustrate complex sets of spatially significant emotions, feelings and subjectivities'. Their research explores working relationships 'with a focus on feminist politics of mentoring and collaboration …in ways where embodied and emotional subjectivities and associated power dynamics shape' the supervision.

With 'inclusion' at the forefront, Barton (2022) expands on (dis-)ability through a critical realist lens, combining qualitative research approaches to understand the lived experience of the hereditary neuromuscular wasting condition. He describes disability as construed as 'the last frontier of prejudices, a challenge to polite, able-bodied society' (p.4), and he expands on the importance of balancing own and others' lived experience in the field. Barton focuses on the need for supervisory support to draw on reflexivity, subjectivity, and own lived experience in the research – which in his case involved support in innovative, creative use of phenomenology. Doyle (2022) emphasises the importance of research supervisors' being 'acquainted with the varied range of neurodivergent experiences [like] camouflaging, double empathy, sensory and social complexities, and neurotransception' (p.17). Doyle's (2022) research titled "Bridging the gap between the autistic individual, the therapist, and the theoretical perspective: an intersubjective analysis" aims to improve practice with research;

and epistemological flexibility became an important part of that process – in his case resulting in an adaptation of Grounded theory to a 'Co-Constructivist Grounded Theory Method (CCGTM)' (Doyle 2022). This resonates with the support described in our earlier studies (Bager-Charleson, McBeath & Challenor 2023) where participants, on the one hand, drew on metaphors to describe 'good', effective supervisors as 'telescopes' and 'mountain leaders' when 'providing freedom whilst helping to see far' or 'supporting whilst entering unchartered areas'. They also used metaphors like 'stethoscope', highlighting the importance of support with reflexivity and creative use of methodology. One participant 'Maria' said "[my supervisor] kept encouraging me to go to the edge of my discomfort ... I [started with a] split internal discussion with myself between [interest in] 'NHS service provision' and own internal confusions and traumas, [which] I think is quite common in research. In my case, there were [my own] inter-generational, racist-related traumas in the background. I found methods because supervision gave me that space…I read and read and thought, "hold on, I can find a different quality in my research voice…" and I took it to her [the supervisor] and she said "absolutely," I think her words were "this research will be safe in your hands" and I thought "WOW"… and I felt I can do this, maybe I can do this! (p.10).

''Outside the sentence''

Charura (Winter & Charura 2023; Charura & Wicaksono 2022; Taylor, Charura et al 2020; Charura & Lago 2021) highlight marginalisation in both therapeutic practice and research through certain socio-cultural and geo-political histories being positioned ''outside the sentence'' (Moodley 2009). The 'sentence' represents typically one of 'masculine cultural metaphors and conventional theoretical epistemologies of counselling, psychology and psychotherapy' which exclude people because of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality/sexual orientation, disability, social class, religion/faith, age, neurodiversity etc' (Moodley 2009, p.297). Winter & Charura (2023) reiterate in their research how counselling and psychotherapy and their research cultures remain Eurocentric and unrepresentative of diversity across many important factors, and how this includes the role of research supervision. In a similar vein Adam, Ratele, Suffla, & Reddy (2022) and Rispel (2023) address relationships and power with decolonial and socially just ways of supervision; embracing a decolonial pedagogy which 'valorises different forms of knowledge, encouraging diverse approaches to self-reflection, and highlights the power of mutual and multi-directional learning' (Rispel 2023, p. 102). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) also argues for supervision practices 'that give voice to postgraduate students and challenge hierarchical power relations' as part of 'rethinking and unthinking dominant ways of producing knowledge'; like Goerisch, D., Basiliere, J., Rosener, A., McKee, K., Jodee Hunt & Parker, T. (2019) who echo critique of 'traditional, formal mentoring structures

established within the space of the university rooted in patriarchal systems'. This dearth of research addressing inequalities suggests, as Ramirez (2021) puts it, that 'academia can no longer be assumed as an objective, static, and neutral institution'. Ramirez (2021) expands on 'epistemic violence' and 'epistemic disobedience' in her study of academics in a Norwegian university. She uses the term 'epistemic violence' for 'epistemic exclusion' of others from the knowledge production process. Similar to the 'outside of the sentence' thesis, Ramirez elaborates on 'zero-point epistemology' for when 'a specific bodily behaviour in academia, characterized by repression of bodily spontaneity, gestures, expressions of affects, and embodied sensations'. This involves construing 'proper academic' as 'characterized by self-discipline and self-control [with]extensive use of logical thinking through well-articulated, formal vocabulary'. Ramirez's study stresses a need for 'resistance and epistemic disobedience' to transgress and transcend 'fixity and binaries' imposed by 'categorizations of ethnic minority academic woman as bodies out of place'. Like most of the references above, Ramirez's study reflects an adaption of traditional research approaches - or, in her words, on 'epistemic disobedience'. She draws on 'a diffractive analysis inspired by Barad's theorizing [where] we come to know/learn as beings of a world in ongoing becoming or 'worlding'; all distinctions are effects of specific entanglements, enacted in specific phenomena, and events/phenomena are emergent and dynamic, always in an ongoing doing mode and enactment' (Ramirez 2021, p.478)

Philosophical Research Viewpoint(s) of this Study.

We position our mixed methods research under the epistemological umbrella of critical realism. Bhaskar (1975, 1998) suggested critical realism is an alternative philosophical position to the classic positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Critical realism accepts the principle of objective realities independent of our knowledge; it also accepts that our knowledge of the world is relative to who we are so that, ultimately, our knowledge is embedded in a non-static social and cultural context -adhering to Barad (2014) statement of that 'practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated [...] we know because we are of the world' (Ramirez, 2021, p. 447).

Dialectical pragmatism

'Mixing' qualitative and quantitative research is riddled with obstacles and often classically positioned amid a historical 'paradigm war', and to our minds resonating with some of the underpinning aims of 'epistemic disobedience'. We adopt an overarching 'pragmatic' approach to methodology and methods guided by 'what's best for the question' (McBeath 2020). We also hold Barad's positionality in mind, believing that we 'know/learn as beings of a world in

ongoing becoming or 'worlding' [with] all distinctions as effects of specific entanglements, enacted in specific phenomena' (Barad, in Ramirez, 2021, p. 447). We recognise for instance that 'what's best' for one may be the opposite for another, and we seek to negotiate this through the lens of what Johnson (2017) describes as a ''dialectical logic'' characterised by "openness for and immersion in multiple perspectives, disciplines, and standpoints, guided by attempts to synthesize and build on insights gained from this process (p.161). Our author team reflect different lived experience and interests in both diversity and research knowledge, which have prompted ongoing negotiations and learning from each other. We have aimed for what Johnson describes as a 'dialectical synthesis' which involves moving between different standpoints or sets of data. Johnson (2017) asserts:

"The dialectical method of dialog and reasoning [offering] a way to thoughtfully consider, combine, or synthesize ideas when binary and dualistic logics fail. Its need and time have come again in the areas of methodologies and paradigms… It will keep returning because reality is complex and multifaceted" (p. 158)

In this survey, quantitative and qualitative research interests have been negotiated with a shared interest in what Braun, Clarke, & Gray (2017) and Braun, Clarke, Boulton, Davey & McEvoy (2020) refer to as 'qualitative surveys'. Qualitative surveys prioritise, firstly, attention to participants' subjective experiences as expressed through 'narratives, practices, positioning, and discourses" by encouraging them to respond 'in their own words, rather than selecting from pre-determined response options' (Braun, Clarke et al 2020, p.2). Qualitative surveys offer, secondly, a potential 'wide-angle lens' to qualitative data. They draw on 'wide scope' advantages of surveys in terms of aiming for a "maximum heterogeneity [and] maximum variation [in ways that] emphasise diversity rather than typicality" (Braun, Clarke et al., 2020, p. 3). This can, in turn, help to "circumvent the risk, which can occur in the typically smaller samples of interview research, that a participant who speaks from a particular non-dominant social position gets treated as 'spokesperson' for their particular demographic or back- ground, rather than just an individual" (Braun, Clarke et al 2020, p.3).

In our case, a dialectical integration of qualitative and quantitative research aims reached a 'synthesis' in the form of a semi-qualitative survey combining closed, open and story-completion questions, as expanded on below.

Ethical Approval

The project received Ethical approval from the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee, MREC. The proposal included originally the working title "Building on Diversity to Generate New Knowledge in Therapy-related Doctoral Research. A Mixed Methods Enquiry into Research Supervision of Counsellors, Psychotherapists and Counselling Psychologists with Diversity related (Socio-Cultural, Dis-ability, Gender- and Sexual orientation) Obstacles and Opportunities in mind".

The survey was designed over a two-step process involving a wide-ranging consultation with scholars representing different areas within diversity, followed by a survey pilot phase. The preparation included contacting experts representing the areas in the title, with suggested survey questions for feedback and additions. The final sets of questions were circulated for final feedback from 10 research supervisors and supervisees with already-published, documented experience in the field, again representing interests mentioned in working title to bring Socio-Cultural, (Dis-)ability, Gender- and Sexual orientation perspectives to the forefront. The consultation process included further feedback on comprehension of questions, question order, survey design, layout, and presentation as well as confirmation that the survey worked technically.

The survey included an initial consent page for survey respondents to click before responding, explaining that responses would be anonymous, that no email or IP address would be stored and that any details shared within the survey responses revealing specific persons would be deleted. The survey hyperlink was distributed using a purposive sampling approach which included distribution through the authors' academic networks within UK, Europe and the States. It was also distributed on social media utilising both Facebook and LinkedIn platforms. The survey was conducted in 2023.

Reflective Online Practitioner Survey

The primary research tool for this study is a short semi-qualitative online survey which combines standard Likert scale questions with open-ended questions and a 'story completion' question. We refer to this semi-qualitative survey with flexible use of combinations, as the *Reflective Online Practitioner Survey* (ROPS) and have tried different versions and contexts for it earlier (McBeath, Bager-Charleson & Abarbanel, 2019; McBeath 2020; Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2021; McBeath, Bager-Charleson & Finlay, 2023). Drawing on story completion in surveys is something relatively new (Shah-Beckley, Clarke & Thomas, 2018; McPherson, 2022; McBeath, Bager-Charleson & Finlay, 2023). It is based on the participants' stories following a brief story "stem" or "cue" by the researcher. Originally used in an 'essentialist' way to access 'unconscious' meaning, story completion has increasingly been drawn upon within a social constructionist, often feminist framework (Clarke, Braun, Frith & Moller 2019) to explore meaning-making. Clark et al (2019) describe it as 'a nonintrusive way of researching

sensitive and ethically and morally complex topics' and use it as an indirect way to the participant's perspectives with potentials to avoid social demands and barriers accompanying self-reports or regular interviews.

A key facet of the Reflective Online Practitioner Survey is the brief survey completion time - typically around five minutes - and the interest in both quantitative and qualitative data (McBeath, 2022). The closed questions are carefully considered to stimulate reflection, with the survey making a point of drawing on qualitative research interests into meaning making and lived experience. This allows for creative, innovating use of the survey to facilitate the respondents' use of own words, in this case by combining open text and story completion questions.

Quantitative Data

The brief survey received 105 responses with 45 coming from research supervisors and 60 from research students. Tables 1 and 2 show demographic data for both research students and research supervisors combined; Table 1 shows the type of doctorate that respondents were involved with, and Table 2 shows a breakdown of respondents by how long they have been working as a qualified practitioner. We recommend, further, the reader to view Figure 7 for an overview over respondents' different backgrounds, interests and foci, asking *'what, within Diversity, concerns you most*?'.

Table 1 describes the respondents' different doctorate belongings.

Table 1: Type of doctorate indicated by respondents.

Type of Doctorate	Percentage
Professional psychotherapy doctorate	37.4%
PhD	31.3%
Counselling Psychology doctorate	18.8%
Other	13.1%

Most survey respondents (37.4%) were engaged with a professional psychotherapy doctorate (e.g., D Prof) with a slightly smaller proportion (31.3%) involved in PhD studies. A counselling psychology doctorate was referenced by the smallest percentage of respondents (18.8%). Within the 'Other' responses noted in Table 1 some respondents referenced Masters courses and one respondent referenced a four-year advanced existential diploma.

Table 2: Years practicing as a qualified practitioner.

Years Practicing (Qualified)	Percentage
1 to 4 years	20.6%
5 to 8 years	12.0%
9 to 12 years	12.0%
12+ years	55.4%

From Table 2 it is clear that the majority of survey respondents were senior practitioners with 12+ years qualified experience.

Preliminary statistical analysis revealed that there were no significant differences in the responses offered by research supervisors and research students, so their combined data will be reported.

Within the survey, respondents were asked how confident they were that diversity and inclusion receive sufficient emphasis within counselling and psychotherapy research. The data shown in Figure 1 clearly show that nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents were not confident that diversity and inclusion issues receive sufficient emphasis in published research. Only 12% were confident in this respect (*very confident 5%, confident 7%);* a further 26% responded *'somewhat confident'*.

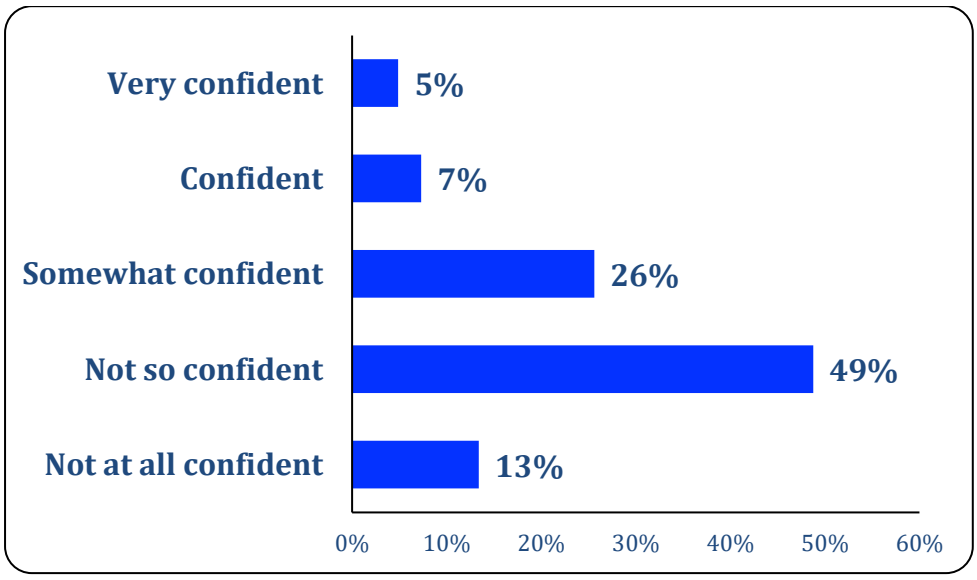

Figure 1: How confident are you that diversity and inclusion receive sufficient emphasis within published counselling and psychotherapy research?

One of the key questions in the survey concerned respondents' views about how diverse they thought the research supervision team was at their own training institute. The resultant data pattern is shown in Figure 2 which reveals that nearly half of respondents (46%) were not confident that their own research supervision team contained diversity (*not diverse* 32%, *not at all diverse* 14%). Only 26 % were confident in this respect (*very diverse* 5%, *diverse* 21%); a remaining 29% were *'undecided'.'*

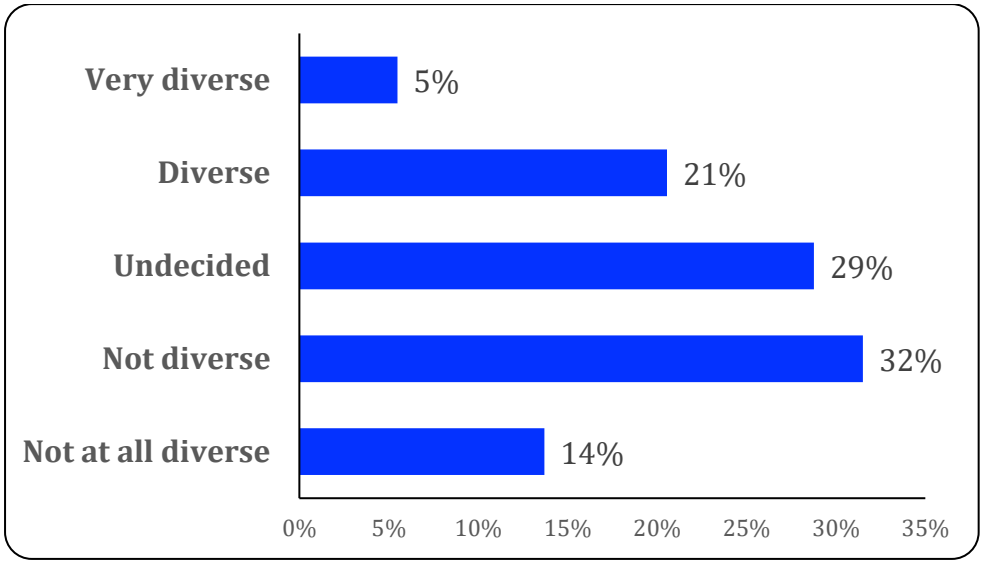

Figure 2: How diverse is the research supervisor team at your training institute?

Survey respondents had the opportunity to reflect on the level of support offered for research projects relating to diversity at their own training institute as shown in Figure 3. A rather inconclusive data pattern was obtained.

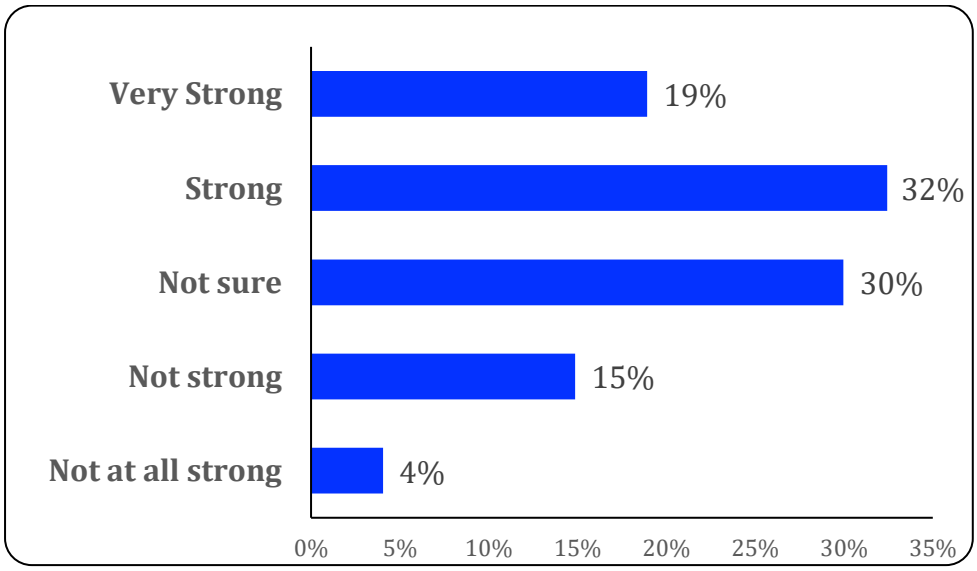

Figure 3: How would you describe the support for research projects relating to diversity at your training institute?

Half of the survey respondents (51%) indicated that support from their own training institute was either *very strong* (19%) *or strong* (32%). In contrast 15% indicated that support was '*not strong'* with further 4% indicating that support from their own training institute was '*not at all strong'*. In addition, almost a third (30%) didn't choose a definitive position and opted for '*not sure'*.

Survey respondents were asked how confident they would feel in raising diversity and inclusion issues within a research supervision relationship. The resultant data pattern shown in Figure 4 was quite clear. Two thirds (67%) indicated that they would feel either *very confident* (30%) or *confident* (37%) in raising diversity and inclusion issues within a research supervision relationship. Only 7% indicated they would not feel confident in this respect. A further 26% opted to choose the *somewhat confident* response option.

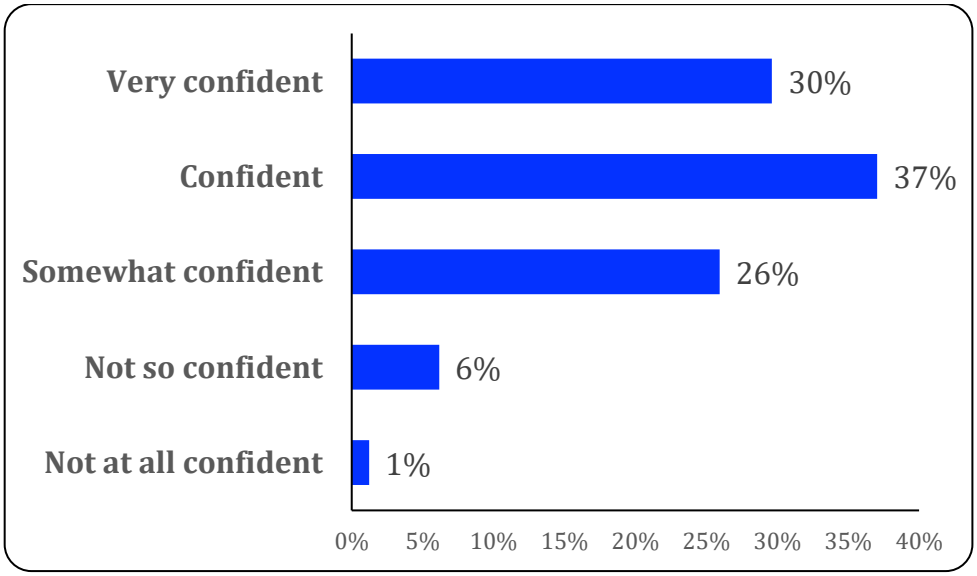

Figure 4: How confident would you feel that you could raise diversity and inclusion within a research supervision relationship?

Perhaps one of the clearest findings from the quantitative data came from asking respondents how much consideration they give to diversity and inclusion when reading about research in counselling and psychotherapy**.** The data, shown in Figure 5 indicate that an overwhelming majority (85%) consider diversity and inclusion when reading published research (*a lot of consideration* 45%, *some consideration* 40%).

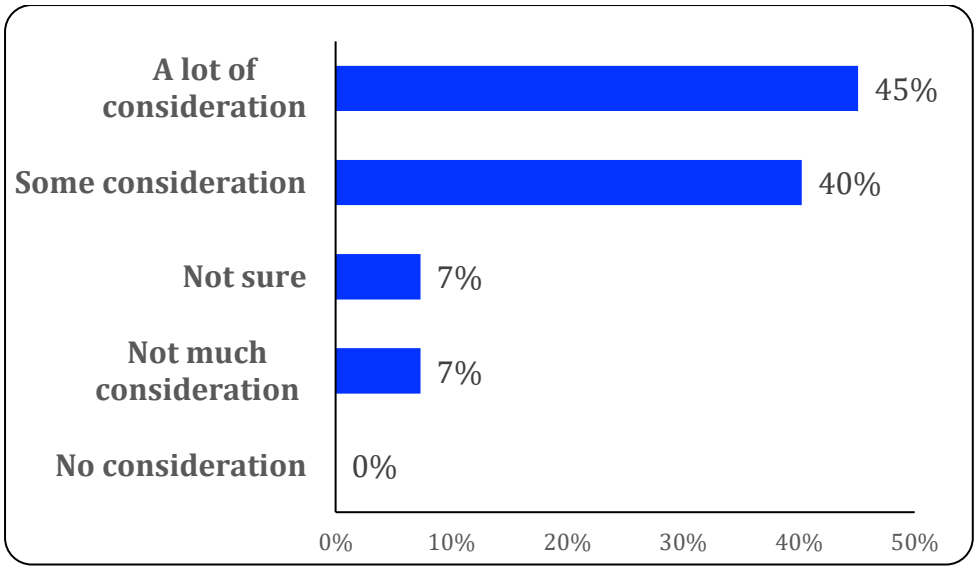

Figure 5: How much consideration do you give to diversity and inclusion when you read about research in counselling and psychotherapy?

Another clear finding came from asking respondents how comfortable they would feel talking about their own or others' cultural background within their own training institute; this is shown in Figure 6. A total of 70% indicated that they would feel comfortable in this respect (*very comfortable* 26%, *comfortable* 44%). Only 14 % indicated that they would not feel comfortable (*not comfortable* 13%, *not at all comfortable* 1%)

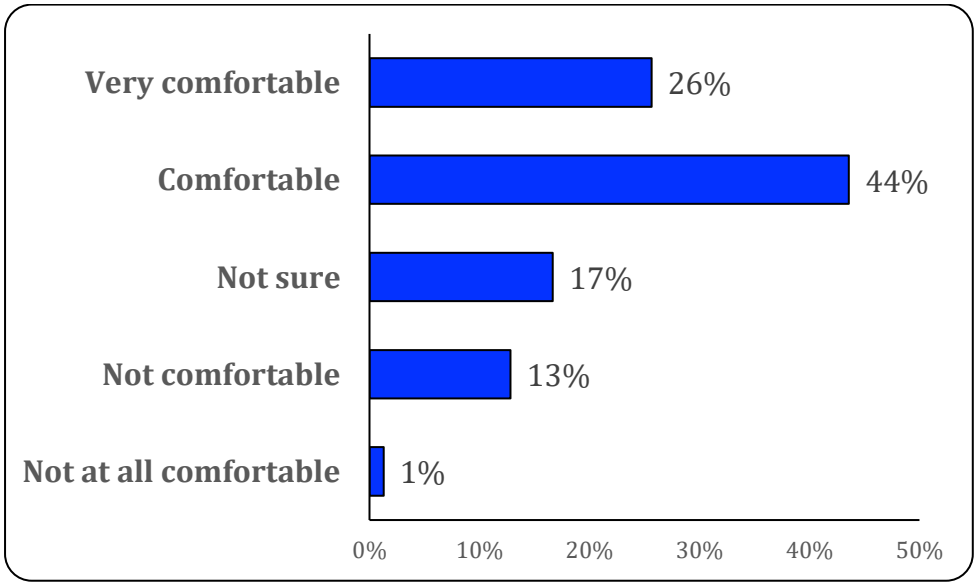

Figure 6: Within your own training organisation how comfortable would you feel talking about your own and others' social and cultural background?

One of the research aims was to get a sense of what issues around diversity and inclusion might be of concern to those involved in the research supervision relationship in counselling and psychotherapy. The relevant data are shown in Figure 7; based on a multiple-choice question allowing respondents to choose multiple response categories from a list of possible choices.

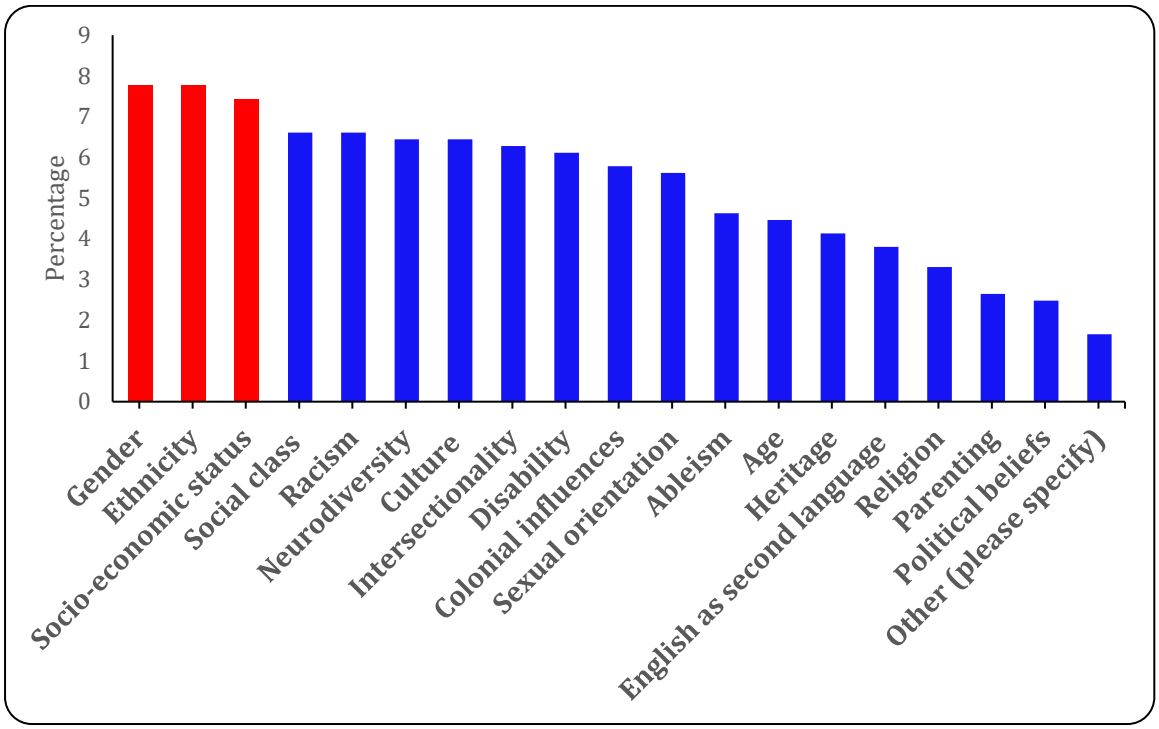

Figure 7: Diversity can include many different factors. Which of these most concern you? (Multiple choice)

Although the differences between some percentages are quite small, Figure 7 shows that *gender*, *ethnicity* and *socio-economic status* were the most popular choices for issues of concern around diversity and inclusion. As we shall see, the free text comments reflected this in terms of frequent references to dominating 'white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives' in research.

Quantitative data summary

The quantitative data can be viewed from two perspectives, and these are from views about professional and organisational engagement with diversity and inclusion and views from respondents about how they, personally, feel they might engage with diversity and inclusion. Data relating to the first perspective reveal unambiguous dissatisfaction from survey respondents. Here are the key points,

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents were not confident that matters relating to diversity and inclusion receive sufficient emphasis in published research.

- Nearly half of respondents were not confident that their own research supervision team contained diversity.

- Only half of respondents considered that there was strong support at their own training institute for research projects involving diversity and inclusion.

So, these three points serve as an attitudinal baseline from which survey respondents considered their views on diversity and inclusion and the research supervision relationship.

Looking at the second perspective in respondents' personal engagement with diversity and inclusion there is quite a positive outlook. Here are the key points,

- An overwhelming majority consider diversity and inclusion when reading published research in counselling and psychotherapy.

- Two thirds indicated that they would feel confident in raising diversity and inclusion issues within a research supervision relationship.

- A clear majority indicated that they would feel comfortable in talking about their own and others' social and cultural background at their training institute.

Although the sample is small, it would seem that while individuals feel able and confident to engage with diversity and inclusion in a research supervision relationship there are real concerns whether there is effective support and engagement with diversity and inclusion at a professional and organisational level.

Qualitative Data

Free text and Story completion questions.

Questionnaires and surveys are, as Saldana (2012) asserts, typically "designed to collect and measure a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs about selected subjects" (p. 93). Quantitative data transform meaning into numbers for statistical analysis into a fixed, linear string of responses by summing all the scores and dividing by the number of survey participants. The ROPS survey aimed, as mention, also for qualitative data – for what Saldana (2012) describes as "three-dimensional…language-based meanings of what the participant values, believes, thinks, and feels about social life" (p. 93).

Our survey included two open questions aimed to support the respondent's own choice of words for personal experiences. Our open question about *"Why do you think that diversity and*

inclusion might be important within research in the counselling and psychotherapy professions?" received 30 responses, which equalled 1640 words.

Our Story completion question received 61 responses equalling 2570 words. In total the open questions generated 4210 words.

The qualitative responses overlapped in many ways with the quantitative findings – but showed also some significant differences. Whilst gender was rated highest in the closed, multiple option question in figure 7, racism was more clearly expanded on in the free text comments. The content of a diversity informed research supervision was, further, expanded on in the respondents' own words. Responses to both questions often positioned diversity in a broader context - with supervision expanded on as part of a bigger, more institutionalised problem.

Data analysis:

The analysis was guided by the six-step process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), which involved:

• An initial immersion and familiarisation with the data.

• A preliminary highlighting or coding of "anything that stands out."

• A tentative clustering of 'codes' into broader sets of meaning and themes.

• Recognising a "saturation" when new codes and themes stop appearing.

• A collaborative re-reading to review, compare and make final selections of themes, to confirm if they remain meaningful and stable.

• Final writing-up of the themes.

We have expanded earlier on our reflexive positioning with references to our interests in 'narrative knowing' (Bager-Charleson 2003; Bager-Charleson & Kasap 2017; Bager-Charleson, du Plock & McBeath 2018) and how people organise 'stories' about themselves and others. When sharing our 'themes' we aim to capture the respondents' own words and 'storying' as much as possible. In brief, the following themes stood out to us.

Table 3: Themes in summary

"Why do you think that diversity and inclusion might be important within research in the counselling and psychotherapy professions?"	**Story completion themes: "Karima wants to address diversity in research supervision… what does she do?"**
1. 'Diversity' means valuing different perspectives on knowledge. 2. Working with different meanings and lived experiences underpin psychotherapeutic practice. 3. An inclusive practice requires an inclusive research. As one put it; *"If we cannot give voice to research participants, how would we be able to hear the clients we see in our therapy practice?"* 4. There is an un-addressed power-imbalance in research, both in 'gaining' access and who is 'being heard'. Some specific areas for inequality were: ● Inherited Western paradigms. ● Racism ● Social class inequalities ● Gender and sexuality inequalities ● Languages and culture inequalities	**1.** A seemingly 'same' scenario is experienced differently by people. 2. A minority carry the burden of having inform a majority of their own prejudices. 3. Diversity should be considered a significant part of the supervisor dynamics, including: ● being addressed from the start. ● resting on mutual trust and safety. ● allowing for space to attend to supervisory microaggression, self-awareness and power dynamics with inequalities in mind. ● requiring supervisory knowledge about EDI related matters. 4. Regulated support and practical action are needed, for instance in terms of: ● Funding ● Recruitment ● Critical review of teaching material, to decolonise and integrate EDI ● Clearer complaint procedures. ● Critical review of 'mitigating circumstances' ● Regular meetings addressing issues**.** **5**. Diversity Focused Supervision training should include considering the following: ● Racism, heritage and ethnicity ● Disability and able-ism ● Language ● Gender and sexuality inequalities ● Social Class prejudices ● Under-resourced marginalised groups

In the respondents' "own words"

To capture the respondents' 'own words' in our qualitative data section, we try to use citations as much.

Our open survey question was:

> "*Why do you think that diversity and inclusion might be important within research in the counselling and psychotherapy professions*?"

To us, an 'umbrella reply' to this question became:

> "*If we cannot give voice to research participants, how would we be able to hear the clients we see in our therapy practice*?"

We regarded some of the following interrelated themes in support of this view. Participants emphasised for instance how:

- 'Diversity' means valuing different kind of perspectives on knowledge;
- At the heart of psychotherapy is working and being with differences;
- A diversity-based practice requires diversity-based research, but;.
- There is an un-addressed power-imbalance in research, both in 'gaining' access and who is 'being heard'

Some specific areas for inequality were:

- Racism
- Inherited Western paradigms.
- Social class inequalities
- Gender and sexuality inequalities
- Languages and culture inequalities

1. '**Diversity' means valuing different kind of perspectives on knowledge:**

Responses highlighted how diversity involved critical reflection and awareness -in both practice and research, around own and others' positionings on personal as well as socio-political levels. One said:

> *"Diversity opens for different perspectives in research [about] knowledge and what we hold as 'reality' in the field of mental health".*

Another respondent said:

> *"Diversity ensures that individuals or groups are not excluded or marginalised [so] all clients receive optimal quality of service without discrimination or bias".*

And

> *"Diversity gives us a chance to think about our own positioning as a researcher and to be reflexive around biases that may creep into questioning or focuses within the research".*

2. At the heart of psychotherapy is working and being with differences

One respondent said:

> "*Diversity is at the heart of practice, because psychotherapy is about working and being with differences on different levels*".

This principle resonated with several others, one said:

> *"Imperative of a person-centred approach [is] to acknowledge [both] the value and inherent difference that is a part of meeting every Other. This extends not just to meeting in the counselling room, but in our work as professionals, academics, and researchers".*

3. An inclusive practice requires inclusive research.

One respondent said:

> *"As therapists and counsellors, we have to be able to support clients from a variety of backgrounds, with a variety of life experiences [and]it is only right that research for our professions also supports this ethos of inclusion."*

Another said:

> *"To ensure representation and subsequent findings from research it is essential that 'every' voice may be heard".*

Respondents expanded further on inequalities in terms of being heard.

4. There is an un-addressed power-imbalance in research, both in accessing it and 'being heard'.

The in our literature review earlier referred to ‘being outside the sentence’-syndrome was a theme in our survey too. One respondent said:

> *“There is a dominance of particular voices, positions and methodologies within counselling professions. These do not allow for those who differ in important ways from the dominant ones and delegitimise and exclude them at various stages of training, research and publication”.*

Another said:

> *“Research tells stories and amplifies voices and experiences. We need to be more conscious about what stories are being told, whose voices are heard, what experiences are deemed valuable for exploration and what 'methods' are considered 'valid' to hear those”.*

Unequal representations in research impacts, in turn, clinical practice. One respondent said, as mentioned initially in this section:

> *“If we cannot give voice to research participants, how would we be able to hear the clients we see in our therapy practice. The co-construction of knowledge must be founded on an awareness of differences in the ability to exercise power”*

Several referred to dominating ‘white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives”. One said:

One said:

> *“Many research institutions have a history of domination by white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives”.*

Another:

> *“Psychotherapy research focus[es] on white middle-class able-bodied heterosexual clients and therapists”.*

Others resonated with this:

> “*Guidelines and best practice has for too long been based on research carried out by and with white middle-class people, and therefore is likely to be at best misguided”.*

And

> *“Because in British academic settings we will inevitably be working within inherited western paradigms which may not fully include or express global majority perspectives”.*

This unequal representation meant that some are being either ignored or pathologized.

> *"The profession has been known to be quite white and middle class with a history of pathologising minorities within some approaches".*

Some expanded on other examples:

> *"Diversity and inclusion is important as there are many groups who have been left out of research and in doing so we know far less about their experiences of therapy, access to therapy, etc. I am thinking of people with a diagnosed intellectual disability for example*".

Only a few referred directly to research supervision. One said:

> *"The supervisor need to aware of the broad range of neurodivergent experiences, including camouflaging, double empathy, sensory and social complexities when working with neurodivergent researchers – who, in turn, then can bring more knowledge about this to clinical practice."*

Interim summary

The open question responses went beyond research supervision, with several references to dominating 'white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives' - often delegitimising and excluding others 'various stages of training, research and publication'. The respondents highlighted how diversity requires openness for different perspectives about knowledge and what we hold as 'reality' in the field of mental health. Diversity involves critical reflection and awareness around own and others' positionings on personal as well as socio-political levels in both practice and research. Whilst diversity *'should'* underpin clinical practice, in terms of 'working and being with differences' being part of 'meeting every Other', many groups are in fact 'left out of research' with consequences on our capacity to meet clients' need in clinical practice.

Story completion themes

Complementing the open free-text question, was a 'story completion' question. We received, as mentioned, 60 responses, reflecting a 60% completion rate and generating 2570 words in total. This was high, both in comparison with other studies using this method and to the previous open question.

Story completion draws on creative and free associative writing (Bolton 2005; Wright 2018). Bolton (2005) writes:

"When asking 'people to talk about their values in abstract terms [we receive] responses. By asking them to tell stories about important experiences we were able to see something of how values reveal themselves in complex, varied and shifting ways to practice'' (p.9),

In this study, the following story stem was offered to the survey participants to complete:

The Story Completion Question:

> *"A new psychotherapy PhD student Karima has been asked to suggest some changes for her training organisation to improve its support for inclusion and diversity. She is wondering what issue(s) to emphasise and what to say. For her the most important issues feels like . . . .What do you think Karima might say ?"*

Story completion themes:

Qualitative research typically focus on how people experience something in the world differently. The story completion question illustrates this point:

1. **The responses to the question were varied.**

The questions offered opportunities to expand, combining general with personal experiences as below:

Some responded in third person whilst others mixed third and first person – usually starting with 'Karima wants' and then ending with 'me' and 'my'. One supervisor wrote, for instance:

> *"Karima's supervisor considers how the subtle types of racism need to be addressed. We are talking also about intersectionality as we can't be one without another. Ie I am not able to ignore that I am a white woman, middle-aged and from a middle-class background and with this position I will be bringing a certain bias".*

To some, the question was unclear or confusing.

> *"Goodness, what a question? This could be an essay!"*
>
> Or
>
> *"I am not Karima so do not know how to begin to answer this question" .*
>
> To some it illustrated a point about not speaking for others:
>
> *"I am unsure what Karima might say. As part of inclusion and diversity it's key to not fill in the blanks, but let Karima speak from her own experience, where she can safely share her thoughts and feelings".*

And:

> *"I have no idea what Karima might say. We cannot prejudge a person's concerns, even if we have a lot more information that which is provided above".*

One respondent expanded on this, and what the question evoked to her/him/they:

> *"Karima is feeling annoyed at the idea of her having to inform her training organisation of its responsibilities of inclusion and diversity. Yet again, the minority is having to inform the majority of their own prejudices. Whilst Karima is prepared to talk about her own experiences of minority so far in the organisation, she is not prepared to be the single voice in this process. She advises the training organisation to take responsibility for their privilege and undertake their own reflective functions to identify what they believe they need to change".*

Some found the question inspiring, one said:

> *"What a wonderful question:)"*

2. Diversity should be considered a significant part of the supervisor dynamics.

The content added valuable information about how diversity could be part of the Supervisory dynamics, as:

- **addressed from the start.**
- **resting on mutual trust and safety.**
- **allowing for space to attend to supervisory microaggression, self-awareness and power dynamics with inequalities in mind.**
- **requires supervisory knowledge about EDI related matters.**

Those emphasising diversity from the start suggested for instance that:

> "*Karima would like to see a proper induction for both research supervisors and supervises that highlights the potential impact of diversity and inclusion issues".*
>
> *"K wants to suggest that research students and supervisors should talk about power dynamics right at the start of the research supervision relationship".*

This includes attention to 'safety'.

> *"To be able to raise issues about my own diversity in a safe space is important. I am open to being challenged but I also want my supervisors to ensure that I'm not being pathologised by the view I hold".*

Safety included being open to explore microaggression and unconscious prejudices**.**

> *"Karima wants to raise the issue of power dynamics in the research supervision relationship and the potential for microaggressions that could go unnoticed".*

Another said:

> *"Karima may feel it important to ask tutors to think / ask about everyone's sense of "difference" as she may think that everyone feels similar in many ways but also everyone may feel different in ways that others may not have considered".*

Others expanded on this point about addressing 'differences' and power dynamics:

> *"There needs to be more emphasis placed on the power dynamics within research supervision relationships and especially the potential wounding aspects of micro-aggressions".*
>
> *"Research supervisors who are aware of their own intersectionalities".*
>
> *"[supervisors] would do better to start with themselves, stop othering anyone not white heterosexual and cisgender, and start treating those not white, cis and het as children. They might also reflect on the likely impact of their actions, inactions and use of language…"*

The supervisor needs knowledge in the field at every stage. One said:

> *"How can I find out how to incorporate EDI into my research at every stage, from literature reviewing through to analysis and discussion of findings. What resources are most helpful? Where can I go to learn about this. Will my supervisor know enough to be able to support me in this?"*

3. **Regulated support and practical action were needed**, for instance in terms of:

- Funding
- Recruitment
- Critical review of teaching material, to decolonise and integrate EDI
- Clearer complaint procedures.
- Critical review of 'mitigating circumstances'
- Regular meetings addressing issues**.**

Some respondents emphasised practical support:

"Research funding which supports people like me to study".

Others stressed the value of regular groups to address issues, one said:

> *"Karima might suggest the setting up of regular meetings (probably Zoom) where there would be student presentations about the challenges facing doctoral students".*

Several referred to teaching/supervisor recruitment:

> *"[we need] more representation within the staff or when guest lecturers are invited in, for there to be conscious effort to bring in all different kinds of people in this profession***"**
>
> *"Hiring supervisors that have a minority experience would be very useful. I know you can't hire from every minority group, but if all the supervisors are white, middle-class, heterosexual and cisgender I might feel a little unseen".*
>
> *"Teaching inclusion and diversity from an anti-oppressive position, to address lack of representation, to address bias in recruitment and promotion"*

A critical review – and sometimes redesign, of existing training material were, further, needed.

> *"[we need] to decolonise the training material by critically analysing and situating knowledge and calling out missing voices***".**
>
> *"Designing resources, training and support for minoritized students".*

This point were made by several respondents:

> *"[we need to] integrate an inclusive and diverse approach to curriculum rather than a 'bolt-on' approach."*
>
> *"The change that needs to happen is for all students and trainers to have a module on talking together on what makes up intersectionality and owning who we are so we are then bringing this awareness into the open"***.**
>
> *"Not just having diversity issues sidelined or presented as an add-on, but actually to have inclusion included in the curriculum and in the diversity of teaching/supervising staff".*

Other addressed complaint procedures, seeking:

> *"Strengthening of processes to deal with when students complain about prejudice or harassment, so everyone is clear how to raise an issue and respond to such an issue and students know where to go for support.*"

Attention to definitions relating to 'mitigating' circumstance was, further, addressed:

> *"Is the process / or board that examines mitigation circumstances aware or sensitised to inclusion and diversity policies. How can Karima raise 'being different' and [w]ho can she turn to within the organisation to confidentially talk about feeling excluded or discriminated against as result of her religion, ethnic or racial group, culture etc."*

Deep-seated changes are, in summary, needed across staffing structure, teaching material and formal procedures:

> *"Any change is about fully embedding true changes to the organisational systemic processes and not ticking boxed. That it will take time, as there are 100 of years of systemic, intergenerational, and personal ways of being which needs understood and unpicking".*

> *"Be open to change - the organisation should be willing to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs of a diverse range of students, from different backgrounds and exposure to life. Confidential feedback mechanisms to report instances of discrimination, bias or concerns."*

4. Diversity Focused Supervision training should include considering the following:

- **Racism, heritage and ethnicity**
- **Disability and able-ism**
- **Language**
- **Gender and sexuality inequalities**
- **Social Class prejudices**
- **Under-resourced marginalised groups**

Again, the unequal power dynamics needed to be addressed:

> *"[we need to] develop and implement anti-oppressive practice, creating spaces for dialogue on inclusion and diversity, teaching inclusion and diversity from an anti-oppressive position, to address lack of representation, to address bias in [teaching and supervisor] recruitment and promotion"*

Disability was referred to as an unmet concern.

> *"Accessibility in terms of disability concerns. Such as severe visual impairment, that the supervision team must be sensitive to the accessibility needs of the visually impaired in terms of university technological services related to supervision: email correspondence, feedback/comments on output, digital resources, etc."*

Language was, further, addressed by several. Some emphasised the value of a more multilingual approach to use of languages.

> *"Awareness of people's cultural and linguistic profiles [is important], and how using English as a foreign language may have subtle effects on the assumptions of the speaker and the listener".*

> *"I would want to see more of a challenge to the regular requirement for research participants to speak good English. I think it would be good to have training input on working with …language .. in a research context and how to work with linguistic reflexivity."*

Gender and sexuality was, further, essential aspects of a diversity focused supervision.

> *"Karima wants to talk about gender issues but is also conscious of being assessed as a student - she doesn't want to come across as negative and decides to remain positive."*

> *"Trans rights. The Trans community is often hidden and is therefore open to significant misunderstanding and misinterpretation from the increasing force of the right-wing media. The training organisation's annual involvement in Pride is great, but more welcoming needs to be done, to communicate inclusivity and understanding of difference relating to gender identity. This may involve Trans events or workshops offered within seminars by the Trans Community themselves, including raising student awareness of how to understand issues such as, for example: Trans women not having a womb, and Trans men menstruating. Gender for some people is easy. My friend identifies as a gay man, my other friend as a queer woman. However, gender does not fall within an easy binary for all. It's incredibly important that future researchers represent and reflect the diversity of our contemporary society."*

Social class makes another key concern:

> "We *need to also acknowledge and include working class students who do not have socio-economic privilege and who would struggle, or are struggling to access, or maintain their place on research programmes due to absence of financial resources."*

Others stressed the importance of considering how 'marginalised' students often, collectively, started from 'under-resourced' position:

> "*Variously marginalised students are less resourced to do research, often having to work extra to support themselves. This is often the case for working-class students, Black and minority ethnic students, disabled students, and others. This is on top of the unpaid labour that marginalised students have to do to educate others about*

oppression, or in the case of disabled and chronically ill students, access support and accommodations or medical care."

Discussion

One of the clearest findings from the research was a concern that there is a lack of diversity in both research and clinical practice. Only 26% of survey respondents felt that there was diversity within the research supervisor team at their training institute. Both our quantitative and qualitative data addressed unequal representations in terms of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and heritage, (dis-)ability and social class – several referring to a 'history of domination by white, cis, non-disabled male perspectives'. Many described 'diversity being left out of research' with consequences on the capacity to meet clients' need in clinical practice. As one said: 'we need to decolonise the training material by critically analysing and situating knowledge and calling out missing voices'. Another stated: "If the research we conduct and draw on as practitioners cannot actively reckon with oppression within…we risk furthering the violence that marginalised clients, practitioners, and researchers face". The story completion responses expanded on the value of addressing diversity 'from the start in supervision'; combined with 'critical reviews' of both training materials and the recruitment of supervisors and other staff.

This lack of diversity among research supervisors suggested by both our quantitative and qualitative data reflect, in turn, a wider systemic pattern of discrimination within postgraduate higher education in the UK and beyond – supporting what Ramirez (2021) in our literature review asserted in terms of that 'academia can no longer be assumed as an objective, static, and neutral institution'. The 2023 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) which is the largest annual survey of post graduate researchers (PGRs) in the UK highlighted for instance that the satisfaction rates for UK-domiciled students of Black, Asian and other ethnicity have all fallen, with the largest decline – five percentage points – being for Black students. Black PGRs were less likely to have been offered specific development opportunities, for example around conferences, teaching and publication. Female PGRs overall were less satisfied with the research culture and community; and the study showed a 12% negative difference in overall satisfaction between disabled and non-disabled PGRs.

Predictably discrimination against certain groups in graduate and postgraduate education is, further, reflected in data about academic staff. For example, in 2022 it was reported that 90.1% of UK professors were white; the figures for Asian and Black professors were 4.0% and 0.7% respectively (Advance HE: Staff statistical report 2022). The same data source also reported that 88.6% of all academic staff were white; the figure for Black, Asian and minority academic

staff was 11%. Similar data patterns pertain to the 'heads of intuitions' (e.g. Vice Chancellor or CEO) with white at 92.8% and Black, Asian and minority at 7.2%.

From an intersectionality perspective, which recognises that peoples' identities are shaped by multiple factors, there are data which clearly indicate a lack of inclusion and diversity within UK higher education institutes – again resonating with other studies mentioned in the literature review, for instance Ramirez (2021) study in Scandinavia. In the UK, the Advance HE: Staff statistical report of 2022 revealed that while 62.4% of professors were white males the percentage for Black, Asian and minority female professors was 3.0%. The survey respondents in the research outlined in this paper clearly felt that the lack of diversity among research supervisor teams was a key issue of concern but until there are more opportunities open to minority groups seeking entry to postgraduate education the situation is unlikely to change significantly.

Data trends for staff in higher education institutes show minimal progressive change in diversity and inclusion over time and that means that there will continue to be a lack of diversity in research supervisors.

What can be done to improve the situation?

One significant input can be in the training of research supervisors where awareness of diversity and inclusion issues, white privilege, and where accepted knowledge structures and traditional research methods can be challenged with a key focus on what it means to decolonise the sometimes-oppressive legacies that have been so firmly rooted in counselling and psychotherapy. The authors have set up a formal research supervisor training programme where diversity and inclusion are core topics and with an overarching goal to develop research supervisors who can evidence their own *'cultural competence'* and recognise and accept the validity of views and knowledge which are unfamiliar or unknown to them (McBeath & Bager-Charleson, 2023).. The author team members have also contributed significantly in support of methodological development with epistemological violence and epistemological disobedience in mind (Charura & Wicaksono 2022; Taylor, Charura et al 2020; O'Brien & Charura 2024). Charura and Lago (2021) address the significance of critical engagement with ontological and epistemological positionings in both counselling, psychotherapy and psychology clinical practice and research. This involves providing space for research supervisees to question the experience of 'being in the world' and of 'the nature of reality' to critically explore how theories of knowledge and methods are generated. This emphasises, in turn, the importance of doing research 'with'

rather than ‘on’ participants, often with reference to participatory research (O'Brien & Charura 2023; Charura & Wicaksono 2022; O'Brien & Charura 2022; Taylor, Charura et al 2020) for instance through photo and object elicitation, and different forms of ‘embodied research’ (O'Brien & Charura 2024) to learn about lived experience in a broader sense than now for a juster clinical service.

Our findings suggests it is time to challenge the traditional and historic research culture within counselling and psychotherapy and to be mindful how research has marginalised or excluded certain groups – with impacts on theory and practice in mental health. This is a challenge where research supervisors can make a vital contribution through promoting supportive, empathic, and democratic research supervision relationships. However, as suggested in the free text comments; this will require systemic changes in terms of supervisor training and organisational support, and sometimes critical reviews of ‘training material by critically analysing and situating knowledge and calling out missing voices’ as one respondent said.

In summary, our recommendations based on this study are the following:

- Reviewing and assessing staff recruitment practices to actively broaden the diversity of the staff team available for doctoral supervision. This will need training and support of the supervisors to find realistic and sustainable ways to be flexible and adapt to different student needs.
- Reviewing, assessing and broaden student recruitment. This might involve monitoring the demographic makeup of doctoral students and seek feedback from all students that includes their evaluation of how they feel they have been supported (or not) in relation to their diversity.
- Encourage (but not mandate) staff to share demographic/identity information about themselves on staff profiles. Not all aspects of identity/diversity are visible. Actively support staff and students to recognise the value of considering the impact of matching and/or differing aspects of identity in supervisory pairs.
- Support students in seeking a second supervisor who might assist with consideration of diversity and their own identity as a researcher, possibly from a different institution and/or academic discipline.
- Where doctoral student cohorts are large enough, encourage/facilitate students to form discussion/support groups to supplement support around diversity provided by staff within the institution.

- Ensure that all research training modules include consideration of diversity within research. This is worthy of its own module/session but also needs integrating into all other research training in examples, case studies etc.
- Address ‘epistemic exclusion’ of others from the knowledge production process and ensure space for ‘epistemological disobedience’ to make new connections and explorations of “entanglements of bodies, texts, data, materiality, language, discourse, relations, and theory in different and unfamiliar ways” (Ramirez 2021, p.479)

Limitations

A limitation of the research reported concerns the survey sample for our semi-qualitative survey. The total number of survey responses was 105, with 60 research students and 45 research supervisors. From a statistical perspective these are comparatively small numbers which, in part, reflects the relatively small population sizes of the groups involved. However, it has to be recognised that the overall number of survey responses generated some quite unambiguous quantitative data patterns and a wealth of qualitative data that proved amenable to thematic analysis. Another facet of the sample to be considered is the purposive sampling method used to target potential respondents. This approach is commonly associated with the risk of obtaining a biased sample which might not be representative of the larger population. For the aims of the research to have a reasonable chance of being successful it was necessary to obtain a homogeneous sample of both research students and research supervisors and the researchers consider that purposive sampling was an appropriated method to achieve such a sample. The researchers have successfully used such an approach in previous research (e.g. McBeath, 2019; Bager-Charleson & McBeath, 2021; McBeath, Bager-Charleson & Finlay, 2023)

Not including more closed demographic questions about the respondents did not allow us to identify any possible 'gaps' or imbalances in the people who have responded, leaving us not knowing our respondents beyond their doctoral studies and therapeutic experience level. The researchers were, further, 'insider researchers' with long experience of being research supervisors, which in turn invariably involves the possibility that the researchers' experience and history influence the research questions, design and data collection procedures (Chavez, 2008). We have aimed to address our positioning reflexively in the introduction, suggesting that our lived experience of both research supervision and diversity are assets rather than hindrances in what we regard a critical realist rather than objective account.

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