**Episode 2: Race for the soul of the profession transcript**

Thank you for taking the time to listen to this series of podcasts exploring the topics of race, racism, and anti-racism, through the themes of unmasking, repairing, and prevention.

Thank you for listening to these podcasts exploring the topics of race, racism, and anti-racism, in the context of counselling and social work. Over the course of six episodes, professionals from our fields will have open discussions and ask how we can unmask, repair, and prevent the harm and trauma that racism perpetuates. This series is a collaboration between staff from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, known as BACP, and Hackney Borough Council. It follows on from the Anti-Racist Praxis Conference, hosted by Hackney Council's Children and Families Service, in May 2022. The report from the conference and links to any other documents or resources we mention, as well as specific trigger and content warnings, will be available in the accompanying show notes. Please be aware that some of the discussions may be upsetting or triggering, so please take care of yourself while listening and afterwards. The contributors to these podcasts come from different backgrounds, and have different personal and professional experiences of race and racism. While none of us are experts or professionals in this field in an academic sense, many of the participants have expertise, based on their lived experience of racism. These experiences have shaped their lives, and make topics very real and very raw. We don't have all the answers to many of the problems and challenges that arise in discussions over the course of the series, but we all share a belief that racism should be discussed as part of our need to better understand its impact on each of us personally, in our workplaces and in wider society. Difficult conversations are a necessary foundation of anti-racism. We need to get comfortable in the uncomfortable. We hope that these recordings encourage and inspire your own conversations, and together, we can all contribute to a much needed movement of change.

My name is Jeremy Bacon. I identify as a white, Irish, and Northern Irish man, and I'm the Third Sector Lead in the BACP policy team. For this episode, I'm joined by Deborah Barnett and David Weaver, to explore what organisations can and should do to address racism and why this is important. To get us started, could you both please briefly introduce yourselves?

I'm David Weaver, President of BACP. I am a black man of Caribbean, and ultimately, African heritage.

My name's Deborah Barnett. I am the Anti-Racist Strategic Lead within Children and Families Service at Hackney Council. I identify as a black, African-Caribbean woman, and use the pronouns her/she.

Thank you both. To kick off our discussion, I would just like to know, from both of you really, what you think the risks are to organisations not recognising and addressing racism. Thinking about what the risks are both to the organisations, to their workforce, and ultimately, to those service users and clients. David, I don't know if you want to start us.

Okay, I think the risk - in fact, I don't think, I know - the risk is, would be devastating, and especially now we have increasing diversity in this country. We have shocking rates of disproportionality in terms of unemployment, within the criminal justice system, health inequalities. Organisations are still, notwithstanding the rhetoric, still not taking up the notion of the need to be anti-racist because racism is what's causing those inequalities and discrimination. If organisations continue the way they are, it's going to have, even if they're not concerned about issues around race, there's going to be an economic cost, at a time of increasing diminishing financial resources in this country. The public purse is going to be devastated, especially now in terms of the economic crisis that we're going through. Not least, the mental health pandemic, which there is, which is affecting all communities. My sense is that unless organisations address those issues around race, then it has an impact on the whole of society, and organisations will not be fit for purpose. I think the risk is absolutely devastating if it's not addressed.

I think I'm going to flick the switch a little bit because I think I couldn't add anything more to what David has already said. I absolutely echo everything that he has said. I want to think about it from an opportunities perspective. The value that could be added to organisations. The value that could be added to people's lives. The sense of belonging and enabling that it will bring to black and global majority individuals that have been marginalised and oppressed as part of organisational culture. I'd like us to think about the opportunities that it presents if we think about anti-racism. The power, the sense of liberty and freedom that it would bring to so many black and global majority lives if this was a focus within our organisations. Yes, sometimes thinking from that perspective is also quite helpful.

I think Deborah is right because I had the fortune, many years ago, of working with Jesse Jackson in the States. You'll know that his mantra was 'Keep Hope Alive'. As a descendent of people that were enslaved, to see what they went through, to what I go through now, and our communities go through now, we've got to keep hope alive. I think there is that twin thing around, the question was about the risk, and I highlighted the risk as I see it. In a sense, actually, we need to look at the opportunities, as Deborah has said, and the benefits to all if we do this. It's looking at them both, but actually, forward momentum comes from looking at the opportunities. In the back of our minds, we need to recognise that if we do not do this, what's at stake? I think that's where organisations and leadership is really so important.

Yes, and I think that what's at stake, and again, I think one of our contributors to the podcast spoke about it earlier, about what matters at the end of the day is about the children and the families, the next generation to come. When I hear that, what's at stake? My mind goes to them. My mind goes to my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren. I hope that they wouldn't have to be in this space, having that very same conversation, because that's what's at stake, it's about them.

Deborah, you've put this context and this conversation very much in a timeline, and I just want to go back and say, maybe, David, you've talked about the global crisis. You've talked about other things that are going on in the world. I wonder what should the legacy be when we look back at this time? How will this contribution be recognised and how will it make the differences? How can it make the differences that will bring about those changes that Deborah has referred to?

Yes, it's, well, I always say, it's what we do in the moment. Too often, what happens is that we have those moments, those moments where we can recruit the right people for those roles. Those moments where white people can call out inequalities. Those moments where even myself, as a black, global majority man, can stand up and be counted, and go into those difficult - it's what we do in those moments that I think is really important. Having these conversations is great, but what do we do with it? What does BACP do with it? The mental health challenge. People need counselling and psychotherapy. It's not good enough that certain sections of our communities are not getting it, for want of our profession seeing them as hard to reach, or that our training does not relate to the therapeutic approaches that are required to actually address that. I'm challenged by what Deborah has said because I can, we could give an analysis all day long. We know that now. I think the challenge is what is it that we do about it, and how do we get people to see that, actually, it's in everybody's interests to be anti-racist?

I want to bring to the forefront what you said about hard to reach. What does that even mean?

Yes, absolutely.

What does that even mean? Where does that come from?

Yes. I was at a conference yesterday, and the terminology, hard to reach, was used. I said, 'Well, actually, the hard-to-reach is you. It's not the communities, it's you because your approach is determined by some kind of truism that people are hard to reach.' That has embedded the thinking within training, within the way that we do what we do. Actually, it's about having the leadership and the approach that does what it's supposed to do, and reaches those people that are more disenfranchised in society. I'm glad you pulled that up because I did mean to make that point. I suppose, in a sense, that terminology has been so normalised. Then what happens as well - I'll be very quick on this - is that people have become so used to language that they say, 'No, we understand, it's not hard to reach, it's about what we do and changing our approaches', but then nothing happens. They remain in that situation where they're marginalised, disenfranchised.

I think, for me, why I wanted to bring it up because, I guess, very conscious of language, but it speaks to that deficit, as if we're talking about black and global majority communities in deficit. Hard to reach. Somehow other than very different. I think that narrative has to change.

Yes, and that's why the terminology global majority is so important because it puts it into its rightful context. When we speak about minorities, and it's not that the word is wrong, but if the practice and the thinking that follows it is around, actually, these people are in a minority, then what does that mean? That means that at times of financial crisis, we've got to deal with the majority, as they see it. This is something that we don't, it's not a political risk if we don't do anything about it. That's why the narrative about global majority is so important. Deborah, you made the point, and you're absolutely right, about the narrative about hard to reach has to be put in its rightful context.

Thank you. David, you mentioned, in part of your response, the responsibility on organisations in preparing their workforce and in the training that people have. There is, I think, sometimes in both counselling and social work professions, a sense that an unconditional positive regard or a willingness to work with everyone, wherever they come from, is hard-baked into the training. That has led to criticisms of colour-blindness within counselling, and I'm sure social work training and practice. I just wonder if you could maybe both say a little bit about what you feel, how that manifests itself, that colour-blindness. Perhaps what needs to be done to address that within training.

We're both looking at each other. Who goes first?!

I get quite fired up about the term colour-blindness. Actually, it's one, if I think back to my lived experiences of experiencing discussions around race, and I, very early on in my career, accepted that terminology colour-blindness. Then that usually followed with, 'Yes, I don't see colour. My best mate is black', or, 'My best mate is Indian.' Actually, if you're colour-blind, then you don't see me. You don't see me as a black woman. You don't see my culture. You don't see what I bring. Then I think, following on from that, the expectation because you are colour-blind that I'm expected to fit into your lens of how you view your colour-blindness. For me, that's an absolute no. I think gone are the days where people should be saying, 'I'm colour-blind, I don't see race', because it's about anti-racism. It's about the action. It's about actively being anti-racist. Colour-blind, for me, is laziness. It's no thought to me as a black woman. No thought to the black children or global majority children in our schools, in our social care system. Yes, it's definitely a no-no for me, and something I would challenge all the time, in any discourse or any environment that I find myself.

Yes, to be colour-blind is an insult. Colour-blind is saying that you're not going to recognise the fact that when I leave here, and I go down the streets of Hackney, that I'm more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. It ignores the fact that the mother of my child, if she found herself in a situation where there were complications with her pregnancy, that she's more likely, five times more likely to die during pregnancy than a white female. It's ignoring racism, and that's why I'd go as far to say it's racist. If you look into it within an anti-racist context, it's racist. In no other sphere of public or private discourse, where there's such catastrophic disproportionalities, would you ignore it.

Yes.

I understand where some people might be coming from when they say that, but actually, it's about learning, and just recognising that it's not acceptable. Listening to people who are on the receiving end of it, who are saying it's not acceptable. As a man listening to women who say, 'Actually, whatever you think or whatever you intended, the effect is this is not acceptable.' As a straight man, heterosexual man, a similar thing in terms of sexuality and so forth. Yes, so I think, been having this conversation for a long time, and that's not what I'm supposed to be saying because we need to have the conversation, but it's a bit 1960s, I think.

Thank you both for that. I just want to move on to any comment you have around how training adapts and changes to actually address some of the problems and the issues that sit alongside systemic racism, and perhaps mean that current training isn't always equipping people to work in this systemically racist background, and to work with clients, either in social work or in counselling. What can be done? Perhaps any examples that you've seen or that you're aware of where changes are happening.

Training in leadership does not address the leadership challenges that leaders need to face in this country. Training in, and the syllabus, the curriculum, in relation to counselling and psychotherapy and therapy is Eurocentric. We know it is. You have people being regarded as outstanding therapists, but we don't understand the culture-appropriateness. How can that be? Training to be social workers, it's the same piece. I'm pleased that BACP have been really taking a stand on this over the last year and a half, and the mentoring scheme, and the bursaries, which is designed to attract black and global majority people into the profession, and to bring to the table the training institutions around looking at the syllabus. That's an example of action that is being taken alongside of the professions. I have to say, with social work, I started out as a social worker many, many years ago, and the reason why I got into social work was because there were bursary initiatives designed to, at a systemic level, change the representation of black and global majority people in the profession and, at the same time, look at the training element of that. A success is that maybe 20 years ago, when people looked at the issue of transracial placements, seeing that black children in transracial placement, fostering or adoption, were bleaching their skin. Then you looked at the training curriculum at the time and it was more to do with, well, place them into a family that loves them, without recognising the psychological challenges within that. That has changed, but we still have a long, long way to go. We can't have this narrative about what professionals need to do, and then leadership training, social work training, counselling training is the other way. It's not good enough. More work needs to be done, but I do think things are happening now. People like Deborah are in organisations up and down this country, in public services, local government, NHS, and in some corporate bodies, that are actually being listened to. Yes, so it's dire, but as Deborah says, it's about hope and about a different lens. I think that things can change, but we need that mobilisation of leadership to ensure that happens alongside communities and black people.

Yes, again, always echoing what you say, David, in terms of some of the steps that we need to take. When I think about training and then I think about anti-racism, I also think about the idea that can we really train people out of racism? Is that even a possibility? Then I think about organisations, but that's an organisation. For me, it's really about the people. It starts with people. Therefore, it starts with the person first and their reflections and their understanding. For me, I'm a great believer in encouraging spaces where we can start off by having that conversation. In Hackney, that's what we've done. We've talked about the issue of racism, the impact of racism. We have gone there and had those brave conversations. Really teasing out the issues. Having time to really self-reflect, look at ourselves. David talks about holding that mirror up to ourselves and looking at where we are really going with this topic, this subject matter. We're on a journey, but hey, we're doing that self-reflection piece. Then the second thing is really about how does that impact what I do with the children that we work with, with the families that we work with? How we do our job. Practice, how does that, being anti-racist, how does that impact the way that I do my job? I'm pleased to say we've done quite a lot of work in Hackney. We've just recently launched our anti-racist practice standards, which makes it clear, we are aspiring to be an anti-racist service. This is the way to go. Anti-racism needs to be at the front and centre of how we work with our children and families. This is the standards, and we will not move from that, we will not move away from that. It's mandatory in the way that we work with our children and families. Pleased to say Hackney has really put the stamp out there that this is serious. We want better outcomes for our children and our families, and this is the way that we get there. I'm not saying we've arrived yet. We've also, over the past few months, been doing something called action learning sets. Again, this is mandatory. Every employee that works within children and families service has to do this process of learning or programme of learning. It's six months of learning, that speaks to the issue of race, racism, anti-racism, but with opportunities for self-reflection. The opportunity to listen to lived experiences. Also to think about what does this mean for the way that I do my job and the way that I work with black and global majority families in Hackney? We've seen a paradigm shift. We've seen lots of white individuals that would have said, a few months ago, 'I'm not racist, I don't see colour', but understanding that, actually, systemically, the way that they've been educated, they have a Eurocentric mindset and approach to the way they've done their job. Often, they've not been culturally responsive or the understanding to get the best outcome for our children and families. There's been a shift. Yes, we have people, we use the analogy of a bus, we've got an anti-racist bus that goes across our service, and I'm pleased to say that I think we've got more people on that bus, doing the work, active in the anti-racism space, than we previously had.

What Deborah shows is that it can happen, and it has happened in the past. If you look at South Africa and the anti-apartheid system and what took place there - I'm a great student of Nelson Mandela. I had the opportunity to meet him actually - I had to get that in.

Not jealous.

People like Trevor Huddleston, like Joe Slovo, these were people, white people, that made a difference in terms of breaking down apartheid. There are those people that exist, and have existed since in this society. It's about white people forming that as a movement because I can't do that, Deborah can't do that. It has to be done. Even the journey that we've gone through, Jeremy, in recent conversations we've had, where you've said you've got into that difficult space, that challenging space, and your mindset has changed. It's not meant that you've just rolled over and accepted it, you've engaged in the conversation and the other people are doing the same, BACP too have done that. It relies upon white people doing that, in partnership, and in a challenging discourse sometimes around black leaders and black leadership within that. I think there's something around, you made the point earlier around, it's about the people. I think you're right. I'm big on the whole thing of recruitment. How about values-based recruitment? You're not recruiting people just on their technical skills, you're recruiting them on their values, their ethics. Discovering whether they've got that empathetic gene, so they can empathise. The ability to empathise and be empathetic and get into the shoes of people that aren't like them. Then think about what the world might be like. I think, I agree, again, like David Cameron in that election I think said, 'I agree with David', I agree with Deborah on this! I think there's something around white people, like yourselves, Jeremy, getting together with others and how can we do this? That's what's important for movement, I think.

Thank you. Just going back to something that Deborah said and that, again, David, you've emphasised, just around this bit, and it's a movement, it involves change. It involves reflection. What would we want to communicate to maybe somebody who's listening to this podcast, who maybe thinks that this isn't the thing for them or that this is somebody else's responsibility to take this on? How do we encourage other people to join us on this journey, on this piece of work that needs to be done? I will be very honest, when I first got involved in this process, I came to it with, I think, from a very different perspective to where I'm at now. It was a result of conversations, but more than that, it was as a result of following up on some recommended reading, the Shereen Daniels book, 'Anti-Racist Organizations', which Deborah highlighted for us. It's a real eye-opener and it felt to me like a bit of a one-way door. Once you have taken on board and you've gone through this, then actually, this becomes part of your purpose and part of your identity too. How do we make this, how do we encourage people. maybe for whom this doesn't feel like their business or their priority, to understand that it really is, it should be, and it will bring about lasting change and positive change for all of us?

I think you mentioned the word there, purpose, and I think people that probably work within counsellors, therapists, certainly for those that work in social care, don't take these jobs lightly. I think they take it because there is something inherent in them that wants to see change for the people that they serve, and so do it in an authentic and real, tangible way. I don't think it's these kind of jobs that you do just for money. How could you not want to be educated, and have the understanding to really make a difference to the lives of the people that you encounter, that you support, that you serve, that you looked after, that you care for? How could you not? Whether that be a white social worker, a white counsellor, a white therapist, how are you going to do the best of your ability, in your job, if you don't have that understanding and you don't have that care to understand? Then it becomes just a job and not part of your moral purpose.

I think that's excellent. I've long advocated for, in counselling, just like they had in social work, something about the principles and purposes. What's the principles and purpose behind counselling, and what's the principles and purpose behind social work, which means that if you want to get into the profession and you've not got that commitment and those values base, you shouldn't be in the profession? There are people in the profession - I said it - that don't have that. I don't think they're a majority, but they don't have that. I think there's something around just really focusing on that piece. I think there's also something, and I go back to the whole piece around the role that white people play within that, and in the profession, but also in their homes. As white people, there will be racists in the family or racist views in their communities, around their social circles and so forth. I think it's, even at that level, just challenging it. Having those conversations in a way that I can't. [?Glen] is one of our best friends and he's white - I do have white friends! Glen has come along a journey and he does that, and things have changed as a result of that. I also think there's something about some of the facts, and people understanding some of the facts of what is going on. In Hackney, the rate of infant mortality in Hackney is the highest in London. It's disproportionately high amongst babies of black Caribbean and black African women. Some massive disproportionalities in terms of the mental health system and black residents being over-represented in mental health settings. The black population of Hackney represents 42 per cent of all detentions, 23 per cent of the total population. There's something around people just understanding what is going on in the lives of the people that come to them. In that practice room, seeing it as much more than just what is my therapeutic approach here? Thinking about, well, what's happening to them outside there that influences how they work with them.

David, I've seen a piece that you've written for the upcoming edition of 'Therapy Today', the October 2022 'Therapy Today', in which you are leaving us as our BACP President, but you're leaving us with a call to action really. One of the things that I pulled out from that, and it relates to my role as the sector lead, is the importance of engaging communities and community organisations. Thinking about the organisations that we're involved in, what can we be doing, what should we be doing, and where do you see that future of true engagement with community organisations? How that can contribute towards this work on anti-racism.

Yes, a really important point. I think that when you engage with communities, you identify that there are a whole host of people in our communities that have counselling, psychotherapy, therapeutic skills, that are having to embark on that through necessity. During the pandemic, there were so many people in our communities, and in our faith organisations and so forth, that undertook counselling with people with emerging trauma. That's happening now. My barber, who's very good because I'd have no hair on my head, he is someone that, actually, academics need to look at. He has saved countless lives. Intervened with young boys, who are suffering from trauma, who are engaged in serious youth violence or are at risk of it, but the state has ruled them out as criminals. In partnership with communities, there's so much that can be gleaned, which can help people get into the profession, who are black and global majority people, but also inform the kind of inputs that are necessary to break down the stigma, which still exists in our communities. It's getting better, but it still exists. People are actually saying, 'We need people to talk to.' I would like that if you invite me back to a conference in five years' time, and I say, 'Counselling is too important to be left to counsellors, you need to collaborate with communities', I won't get the backlash that I got from a few people who felt that, actually, no, how dare you criticise counsellors? Which is not what was being done. There are many outstanding counsellors out there, who are doing excellent work. There are many out there that want to make a difference, but for the training not being in line with what is required, and but for the profession not collaborating and making sure, as a movement, that we change this piece. Community organisations and communities and faith establishments, and just engaging with people that are working in organisations, just like you're doing here, with Hackney, doing it in other councils, in health authorities and so forth. That will make people see the relevance of counselling and psychotherapy, and make government stand up and listen, and see the relevance of counselling and psychotherapy in addressing the mental health pandemic that, actually, politicians have caused because they've not got on the platform of social justice and human rights for all.

How do we ensure that the voices of people who are from the communities that are most at risk of marginalisation, how do we ensure that those voices are heard in our planning and the development and our future planning of our organisations?

I think, for me, again, just doing the role that I do within Hackney, one of the fundamentals is, firstly, the listening. What are communities saying? Are we listening? This notion of not being done to, but being done with. Listening. Collaboration. Co-production. I don't know if they're in the right order, but some key principles that we're certainly taking away in terms of making sure that our communities, their voices are front and centre of how we do our work around anti-racism in Hackney.

It's that nothing about us without us, isn't it.

Yes.

Collaborating with people like Deborah, who are up and down the country, because sometimes we say, 'We don't know where these people are', they're people who are leaders, giving them the leadership roles, on the top teams. This is business-critical. They're on the top teams. They're taking those leadership roles, and they know how to and who to engage with in those communities because the whole mantra of co-production and all that stuff is writ large. We talk about it all the time. We have an opportunity for doing it, and I think communities know they need to engage in it. It's not a luxury now not to talk to those service providers that are not providing the service. Again, just to take on the challenge that was set at the beginning, we have to have some hope in this. Well, we have to, but we also can see that it's happening in places.

Thank you. We're coming to the end of our conversation and I just want to thank you both very much for sharing, and for giving us some of these key messages around why anti-racism is of critical importance to organisations, the people that work in them, and ultimately, the people that they serve. I'd just like to give either or both of you the opportunity to maybe just leave us with a closing comment. Perhaps if there's somebody listening to this that maybe wants to do a bit of further exploration, is there anywhere that they should go to find out more about this and to explore this for themselves?

Well, I'm happy to, something that we've adopted in Hackney, and this is something we're taking through from our recent Anti-Racist Praxis Conference, and it's that mantra, it's time that we need to stop chat and act. It's all in the action. Stop chat and act.

Boris Johnson said, but he didn't mean it in the same way, 'Let's get it done.'

Yes.

There's also, I'd encourage people to read the document, 'Race for the soul of the profession', and what that is, a document, which we've authored at BACP, which is essentially saying that if we're going to save the profession, because it is a risk, we need the race for it is about addressing the issue of race. Unless we address the issue of race, the profession will not exist in the way that it needs to exist to address the challenges that we face. The last thing is there is no reason why people who that, actually, you are the kind of person in the community that people come to talk to, that you give advice to, that you keep people out of problems and troubles and so forth, there's no reason why you shouldn't become a counsellor or psychotherapist. If you just feel that, actually, this is something I could do - you could be a 12-year-old, 13, 15-year-old. You could be up to the age of whenever. It doesn't matter, contact BACP. They will speak to you, and there will be people that can speak to you. We'll encourage you and we'll get the training right, so you get the right training to actually do the job to the high standard and quality that our communities deserve.

This has been the anti-racist praxis podcast. Guest biographies, links, and resources can be found in the show notes. BACP and Hackney Council would like to thank all of our guests for making the time to be involved, and speaking so openly and honestly about their experiences, and to all of you for listening. We hope these podcasts spark conversations in your day-to-day.