Power, Identity, and Social Positioning in the Professional Lives of Black Counselling Psychologists: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work submitted in this thesis is entirely the result of my investigation, except where otherwise stated.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

Background: Despite increasing recognition of the importance of race and ethnicity in Counselling Psychology, there remains a lack of attention to the complex relationship between professional identity and racial identity for Black psychologists. This study addresses this gap by exploring how these identities intersect and what this means for the profession. Methodology and findings: The author conducted semi-structured interviews with seven counselling psychologists in the UK, focusing on their professional and racial identities. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis, the study identified several discourses among the participants, including practices of self-preservation and social activism. The analysis reveals that the participants' identities are not fixed or uniform but are constantly constructed and negotiated within their professional lives. Implications: The findings of this study underscore the need for greater awareness and discussion of the dynamic interplay between professional and racial identities in counselling psychology, including recognising the effect of broader societal power relations and cultural values on professional identity construction. It also highlights the crucial importance of supporting Black and ethnic minority counselling psychologists in navigating complex and sometimes conflicting demands placed on their identities. The study's broader implications for the Counselling Psychology profession in the UK are also discussed, emphasising the need for empathy and support within the field.

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My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly. Allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restriction of externally imposed definition. (Audre Lorde, 1984)

To navigate towards a profession is to see, anticipate and try to find one's way in. This process can be described as one's vocation, which, when placed in sequence, is shaped and governed by experiences which are innate to how we construct and understand facets of our social identities (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Assuming that one's experiences serve as a vehicle through which we navigate, we can also assume that constructs such as group membership influence related behaviours or how one identifies with one's life choices (Sjöholm & Wellington, 2015), including how one manages to navigate and convey this within their chosen occupation. An example of such a construct is racial identity.

Markus and Nurius (1986) propose that sociocultural and historical context shape identities. When individuals are perceived as 'less than' due to the colour of their skin, it can severely restrict their professional identity and potential, thus inhibiting their personal and professional development (Slay & Smith, 2011; Goffman, 1990). Defining oneself does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it evolves in a world already defined. One's sense of self, including racial identity, invariably fragments a larger identity into myriad levels, reflecting a more complex identity (Campbell et al., 1996). Seward (1956) argues that colour is inherent to the self and identity concept. Therefore, an awareness of ourselves as cultural entities is imperative – not only for individuals but also for 'the social context that assigns value to perceptions of colour' (Proshansky & Newton, 1973, p.176). This understanding influences an individual's chosen profession (Helms & Piper, 1994; Evans & Herr, 1994), their professional identity and their ethical obligations to both their work and society (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2021).

While various dimensions of difference, such as religion, gender, sexuality and class, shape how Black and ethnic minorities develop their professional identities, skin colour is the most salient and noticeable difference (Ross et al., 2016; Gonzalez-Smith et al., 2014). This is largely due to the inherent inequalities and classifications that have shaped political structures affecting social relations (Gonzalez-Smith et al., 2014). Jackson (2010) suggests that

complete alignment with one's racial epistemologies and ontologies is impossible, making identity negotiation inevitable for Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) professionals.

While literature exists on the relationship between racial identity and working with differences, a noticeable gap exists regarding contemporary vocational choices and professional identity construction for Black and minority cultural groups (Tinsley-Jones, 2001; Slay & Smith, 2011). Counselling psychology acknowledges the importance of race and identity in self-concept formation, but despite its commitment to diversity, significant research gaps persist – particularly concerning race and UK minority counselling psychologists (Ade-Serrano & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2016). This gap is especially pronounced regarding how these constructs are understood and constructed for Black counselling psychologists.

Understanding how Black counselling psychologists articulate these constructs within their professional relationships could significantly benefit counselling psychology. Given the profession's differentiation from other applied psychology fields through its commitment to cultural sensitivity (Martin, 2015) and its reflective and reflexive practices, one might expect that the literature would reflect a dedication to addressing social inequalities in a way that encompasses diversity within the profession. Without addressing this gap, it is difficult for counselling psychology to present a credible argument for its commitment to equality and diversity (Ade-Serrano & Nkansa-Dwamena, 2016).; if the research does not represent Black and minority counselling psychologists, how can the profession effectively support them? Therefore, there is a critical need to explore the relationship between racial identity and professional identity, particularly focusing on how Black counselling psychologists discuss the intersection of these constructs in their professional environments.

Reflexivity

As scholars engage with their chosen lines of inquiry, they should remain aware that research shapes both its audiences and the investigators (Kasket, 2012). While it is easy to make assumptions about the subject matter, attending to how such assumptions structure the research process and the production and interpretation of data is essential.

Reflexive practice, rooted in counselling psychology, provides a disciplined means of sustaining this scrutiny and promotes ongoing interrogation of assumptions and expansion of understanding.

Importantly, reflexivity is not only a personal exercise but also a methodological commitment. At the outset, I expected that systemic inequities would be evident and aimed to foreground participants voices. By critically engaging with my own biases, values, and assumptions, I aim to ensure that this research process remains transparent, rigorous, and ethically grounded. This involves consistently questioning how my positionality and assumptions shape each stage of the study— from the formulation of research questions to the interpretation of participants' narratives. Given potential affiliation pressures arising from shared identity and my trainee status, I used non-leading prompts, made my assumptions explicit in interviews, and engaged in peer debriefing to test my interpretations. In doing so, I seek to balance my personal experiences as a Black counselling psychologist in training with the responsibility to represent participants' perspectives authentically, without allowing my assumptions to overshadow their meanings.

Based on phenomenological, existential, and humanistic thinking, counselling psychology argues for people to be considered holistic beings (Woolfe et al., 2003). The emphasis on reflexivity in psychological research underpins the importance of the unique commitment to personal development and the all-encompassing relationship between the personal and professional self (Donati, 2016). Therefore, as the lead researcher and as a Black counselling psychologist in training, I endeavour to develop values that align with the profession and my personal development.

Different aspects of my identity, positionality and lived experiences will shape aspects of this research in various ways. From the selection of the literature and the analysis of findings to the trajectory and outcome of this research, my identity as a Black woman inevitably informs the lens through which I engage with the existing literature. As I navigate the scholarly texts and empirical studies, I am already drawn to narratives that resonate with me. This inclination may influence the selection and interpretation of literature, potentially shaping the study's thematic focus and theoretical framework.

Similarly, my dynamic with the participants in this study may be inherently influenced by our shared racial identity and experiences. As a Black woman engaging in this process, I anticipate a level of rapport that may facilitate open dialogue. However, I am also mindful of the power differentials inherent in the researcher-participant relationship and the potential for my identity and shared

experiences to influence participant responses inadvertently. Equally, I carry with me certain expectations about the outcome of this study, shaped by my personal and professional experiences. Amidst this context, I acknowledge the significance of remaining open to unexpected findings and perspectives that may challenge my preconceived notions. My commitment to amplifying marginalised voices and challenging existing power structures within psychology may also shape the interpretation of the findings and conclusions drawn from the data.

My decision to engage in this research stems from a desire to address my tension with this subject matter. This awareness offers both valuable insight and presents potential challenges. Through explicit acknowledgement of my biases and sustained reflexivity, I aim to adeptly navigate the intricate intersections of power, identity and representation. This approach is intended to foster my authenticity and allow me to engage explicitly with my biases, assumptions and motivations while allowing this research to contribute to the advancement of a more inclusive and equitable discourse within the field of counselling psychology.

My Relationship

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903, p.9).

This research has emerged from a sense of awakening from a cluttered state of perplexity to a state of realisation, reflection and a troubled sense of self and identity. Informed by personal experiences, I have developed a deep desire to understand not only my dynamic processes of this emerging identity and its future but also the experiences of others. However, I remain mindful that what I have experienced is in no way a reflection of others and will, therefore, claim no universal truth. Nevertheless, I believe it will help uncover another layer of the multifaceted complexity of identity and race and how it is experienced. Likewise, in reading this work, you may come across elements of your own experiences or, at best, develop a richer understanding of the dynamic aspects of identity through the lenses of others.

Although mostly subliminal in my early years, I am reminded that the colour of my skin and my ethnic background are those of a minority; in some ways, this dissimilarity has at times felt tainted. The quest to understand myself

and how these differences fit into the broader context of my environment began at a young age. However, I could not understand its complexities, identify with what it was or where it needed to be placed. I always longed to belong to the broader extremities of a group, yet I did not understand what or whom I was yearning to be part of.

As a Black British woman of Caribbean heritage, I have felt as though I have been perceived in a somewhat distorted manner. Most recently, I have been labelled a professional, which brings access to a particular social group and lens. This professional lens allows me to see the world through the socially restricted constraints prescribed to 'people of colour'. This leaves me feeling troubled at times, as it initially banishes my uniqueness under a veil of darkness through my physical demarcation of difference and then, by the lack of clarity from others to see beyond my exterior and my absence of transparency to see myself outside what has been ascribed and prescribed for me (Du Bois, 1903).

When entering imposed views, I often feel that I can never be wholly embraced and embodied for my uniqueness, with my ethnic heritage, the colour of my skin, in some way deemed unsuitable for this monocultural society in which I live and believe I belong. Deeper scrutiny of that society highlights some negative associations, leaving an overpowering feeling of loss, grief and rejection. My quest to feel accepted saw me lose a large part of my life trying to conform to the values and beliefs of a dominant culture. I realise now that, for a long time, I struggled with the dilemma of whether to bring my ethnic heritage into my developing professional self.

As I struggled with this loss of identity, a devalued, conflicted self, I felt that I was only able to take on this professional journey traces of my identity, which left me feeling fragmented and, in some way, 'fictitious'. This has left me questioning not only my own emerging racial and professional identity but also my understanding of these phenomena and how they are shaped, moulded and manipulated implicitly by what appears to be a living, breathing, untouchable force. How does one navigate these multiple roles without feeling compromised, if at all? This leaves me questioning the complexity of one's racial and professional identity and how they coexist in harmony while keeping their unique, colourful and complex states.

I appreciate that at this point there is still much work concerning BAME individuals within the counselling psychology profession and, as such, appreciate the limitations of this work. However, I trust it will be of value to the profession and other disciplines as it will give depth and understanding to the complexities

of professional and racial identity and contribute to learning, and the professional journey of growth, self-awareness, self-monitoring, self-regulation and self-concept (Bandura, 1986).

Overview

What follows is a brief outline of the thesis. In Section 3.2, the method used is briefly discussed. The remainder of Chapter 1 defines some key terms and Chapter 2 presents the Literature Review. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data. This analysis is discussed in Chapter 5, and the conclusions are presented in Chapter 6.

Defining Terminology

Contextualising Language

One way we use language (words, images, technology) is to group individuals into categories. Through this discourse, narratives are produced and judgements are formed (Wodak, 2012). Through this behaviour, we learn to reject and seduce, neglect or favour individuals and, in doing so, negate the complexities behind our language use. In today's society, many stigmatised groups and individuals identify and live within their assigned or assumed identities because of the use of language. While much of this is socially constructed (Fanon, 1952/2008), the role of language in shaping these meanings is undeniable and plays a powerful and complex role in how we see ourselves and others (Pratt et al., 2006; Rasmussen, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to understand that these constructs and their use are, at best, conceptualised somewhat differently, have compounded meanings and are continually changing.

Acknowledgement of the shifting meaning in research and the contextual meaning applied by individuals in everyday discourse (Watson, 2004) is given throughout this paper, such that the terms used – Black, Asian, race, ethnicity, culture, White, minority, BAME – have different and evolving meanings to different people. Additionally, although the debate about the inter-use of meanings remains, it is important to clarify the meanings used within this paper and their role in constructing identities (see Appendix 1).

Identity

Unravelling the complexity of identity shows how multifaceted a phenomenon it is to embrace. It carries a depth of ambiguity regarding political and scientific disputes (Buckingham, 2008; Fearon, 1999) and plays a central

role in the everyday discourse of the construction of self. Identity is a unique personalised construct that can be rigid and consistent, hence scarcely altering (Oyserman et al., 2012). Yet, it is also fluid, shaped by broader social collective relationships and distinguishes individuals from one another (Buckingham, 2008). It is socially significant (Fearon, 1999), as it is created through social categories, which play a crucial role in deciding group rules and membership by named characteristics, features or attributes (Fearon, 1999; Hocoy, 1999; Gidden, 1984).

Identity includes a source of one's self-worth (Fearon, 1999), one's theory of personality and self-concepts (Markus & Cross, 1990) and what one believes is true about oneself (Oyserman et al., 2012). These are tied up in narratives that can be understood as relational, contextual and constructed through historical, cultural and social discourse, reflecting one's external and internal worlds (Paulraj, 2016).

Though this linguistic interpretation may appear brief in its understanding of identity, knowing oneself must feel identity-congruent based partly on one's assumption of stability and fluidity. Over time, a divide from one's identity may lead to feelings of incongruence (Rogers, 1961), affecting the quality of developing identities and intra/interrelations (Grafanaki, 2013).

The Conceptualisation of Difference

The development of one's individual or group identity cannot be understood without understanding and acknowledging the context into which one is born. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the emergence of race as a biological construct, with theorists such as Darwin, Farrar and Knox promoting the notion that distinct racial types were naturally ordained and that physical features such as skin colour reflected differences in intellectual ability. These ideas, now widely discredited, contributed to the scientific justification of racial hierarchies and were rooted in the broader context of colonialism and social stratification (Tucker, 2006). These pseudoscientific theories gave rise to imperialism over Black people (Moodley & Palmer, 2006) as it positioned Black people as other, seeing them as inferior to White European people (Fernando, 2010; Mama, 1995). As a group, the legitimacy of these earlier concepts has been continually disputed, as their genetic disposition shares no conclusive link to the compositions exclusive to one group except that of humanity (Ossorio & Duster, 2005).

The validity of these earlier assumptions has been continually disputed, as people's genetic composition provides no conclusive link to exclusive racial differences between one group and another (Ossorio & Duster, 2005). Instead, the contemporary arguments for this attitude legitimise the scientific discrimination against groups of people identifiable by a small number of phenotypic characteristics and skin colour (Foster, 2004; Jamison, 2015). While this may serve to create Eurocentric views (Higginbotham & Anderson, 2006) to support the racialised societal dissonance concerning individuals who appear the same (Brown, 2009), it is unrepresentative of the entire Black and minority population. Its validity fails to capture one's internal reality; those who do not subscribe to this social category, and those who feel their skin colour does not affiliate them with one group. Thus, while race is mainly defined by 'contextualism' and claims no universal applicability nor limits itself to a specific region, time, purpose or social ideology, it is born through learned contextual and socially constructed practices (Appiah & Gates, 1996).

This paradoxical nature has given rise to a more powerful divide (Taylor, 2006; Mama, 1995), where complex social meanings like belonging to a group depicted as Black or ethnic minority shape the mechanisms of stereotypes, elicit status assignments (Banks, 2006), relations and how people are expected to understand themselves and others (Higginbotham & Anderson, 2006). This discourse on race has created a system of power relations that privileges Whiteness over other racial identities, constructing White people as the norm or default identity and marginalising those who do not conform to this constructed identity.

When entering a majority culture, race and its meaning become highly charged and relevant in discussing identity (Odusanya, 2016) as, for some individuals, the term may need to be negotiated or reconstructed (Barrett et al., 2003; Bell, 1990; Jackson, 2010). While its narrative does not reflect the complexity of diversity (Atewologun et al., 2010) or how people embrace or defy it (Dalal, 1993/2006), the inherited legacy of thinking developed through prejudice and discrimination over physical appearances (Fernando, 2012) remains prevalent and the dominant discourse in society (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Thus, it highlights human experiences and relations and accounts for the power of race.

Research Question

This study investigates how Black British counselling psychologists navigate the intersection of their racial and professional identities in professional relationships.

The Research Question:

How do Black British counselling psychologists construct and talk about the interplay of their racial and professional identities in their professional relationships?

By exploring this question, this research seeks to address a gap in the current literature and highlight implications not only for the profession as a whole but for counselling psychologists in terms of their practice, professional relationships, research and future training.

Literature Review

This chapter presents a critical and descriptive thematic analysis of the literature on race, identity and professional identity for Black and ethnic minority people. Its purpose is to examine existing research on the issues of race and identity within the field of counselling psychology, with particular focus on the challenges faced by Black and ethnic minority psychologists in developing their professional identities. It aims to synthesise current knowledge on these issues and identify gaps in the research.

Method of Literature Search

Multiple searches were conducted on journals and specialised databases such as EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, ResearchGate and PsycINFO and searching for books, articles and previous theses at the London Metropolitan University Library and the British Library. Original keywords included 'counsel(l)ing psychology and Black/minority', 'psychology identity, Black, minority' and 'counsel(l)ing/clinical/psychology, identity/black/ethnicity/BAME/minority', /professional, professional identity.

Ridley's (2008) snowball technique was also used. This involved using the reference sections of dissertations, both published and unpublished, and papers I had found as a source of further potential material. As the review of papers expanded, other keywords covered in the searches included feminism,

discrimination, Foucault, power, personal experiences, minority professionals, professional minorities, trainees, people of colour/color and identity trainees.

The Emerging Professional

In critical psychology, there has been an ongoing debate over how individuals inadvertently perpetuate implicit shared norms while navigating their identities within social groups (Goodbody & Burns, 2011). While some scholars argue that identity is a personal construct, others contend that it is shaped by group membership or classifications such as race, gender, and age, which produce insider and outsider categories with preassigned meanings (Atewologun et al., 2010). These dynamics can have real-world implications for professionals. For example, Abebe and Harper (2019) reported that BAME psychologists in the UK face unique challenges in developing their professional identities within predominantly White environments, citing a lack of support and understanding from White colleagues towards the difficulties they encounter.

The challenges faced by Black and ethnic minority psychologists in developing their professional identities highlight broader societal discrepancies in how conformity to norms and group membership are valued (Tatum, 1997). Differences in support and understanding between colleagues may further compound these disparities, ultimately shaping individuals' racial and professional identities. As Williams, Faber and Duniya (2022) and Cazer and Creary (2016) note, these dynamics reflect systemic issues that affect individuals across various fields and situations.

Despite the potential benefits of professional identity, such as group belonging and power (Goodbody & Burns, 2011), prestige (Slay & Smith, 2011) and a degree of freedom (Moore & Rae, 2009), individuals with stigmatised identities, including Black psychologists, are often afforded less prestige. This results from the outsider status of their racial identity (Pieterse, Roberson, Miranda, Paiko, and Kirkinis (2023); Slay & Smith, 2011), compounded by psychology's dominant Eurocentric ideologies (Dixon & Okoli, 2023; Huan, 2019). Stigmatised identity refers to membership of a group assumed to be inferior, producing asymmetrical power relations in which the dominant group holds more influence when integrating with others (Burns, 1992). Kenny and Briner (2007) argue that racial identity is central to an individual's overall identity; thus, contextual factors surrounding race play a vital role in shaping how racial identity influences the capacity to develop a professional identity. This relationship can be understood through the lens of cultural capital (Huan, 2019),

which encompasses the skills, knowledge, shared cultural practices and experiences that vary between racial and ethnic groups. Cultural capital shapes how individuals navigate professional landscapes and influences their access to resources and opportunities. For many, this journey begins in academia, where race-related challenges such as discrimination and stereotyping (Clark et al., 2012) can impede the development of cultural capital, further complicating professional identity formation and highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of these dynamics.

Building on this, Morgan (2008), in her exploration of race in psychoanalytic psychotherapy training, asks, 'Whose problem is it?' (p. 34). She argues that, too often, when race is discussed in relation to a lack of diversity in training, the burden is unfairly placed on Black applicants, allowing the dominant culture to evade responsibility and understanding. While Morgan's insight is valuable, her reliance on unpublished material raises questions about the validity and generalisability of her findings, especially in the absence of peer-reviewed evidence. Nevertheless, the study aligns with similar research (Dodzo, 2016; Hamilton, 2009; Clark et al., 2012; Hocoy, 1999), which documents how minority students often experience feelings of isolation and pressure to suppress their racial identity to fit prevailing cultural norms (Lee et al., 2024).

Although these studies illuminate the challenges faced by BAME psychologists, some researchers have questioned whether the solutions proposed to date are sufficient. Bonilla-Silva (2015) describes the phenomenon of 'new racism', which disregards race-based inequalities while enabling more subtle and covert forms of discrimination to flourish, often through concepts that obscure or reframe racism. Similarly, Grzanka et al. (2019) found that Black psychologists in the United States described feeling ostracised and undervalued in predominantly White organisations, further emphasising the need for more comprehensive efforts to promote racial equality and inclusion in academia.

Apfelbaum et al. (2008) coined the term 'strategic colour blindness' to describe how institutions sidestep addressing race-related issues (Sue, 2013). This ideology, rooted in the belief that racial differences should not influence decisions or behaviours, has been challenged by contemporary scholars for overlooking systemic racism and the experiences of minoritised groups (Bassett, 2021; Apfelbaum et al., 2012). Similarly, Zhang and Kirby (2024) argue that such 'colour-blind' policies obscure the realities of discrimination and diminish the racial and ethnic identities of minority individuals.

Drawing on UK higher education leadership, Barnes (2022) shows that women from Black and other minoritised ethnic groups face intersectional barriers, structural inequalities, institutional racism and racialised microaggressions, highlighting the need for an intersectional lens in understanding these experiences. Although Barnes's focus is leadership rather than training, these dynamics extend into professional preparation and expose the persistence of colour-blind approaches in academia and curricula (Bassett, 2021; Addy et al., 2021). Consequently, trainees and staff who describe themselves as 'race neutral' are ill-prepared for discussions about race and cultural identities, indicating that professional training lacks essential competencies for navigating these topics effectively (Baslari, 2020).

Thus, merely creating new concepts is insufficient to address the complex challenges faced by Black and ethnic minority psychologists in academia. It is necessary to interrogate the origins, implications and effectiveness of such concepts, while exploring how minority students navigate these constraints, particularly when additional factors such as gender or sexuality further shape their experiences.

Shah et al. (2012) explored the experiences of trainee clinical psychologists from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds. While their findings differed from Morgan's (2008) account, the study revealed an intricate interplay between racial and professional identities. Some students engaged in introspection, using their racial identity to shape their professional identity and maintain cultural authenticity in professional interactions. Others struggled to prioritise their professional identity over their racial identity. Feelings of invisibility, isolation and marginalisation were common, echoing previous research (Sue, 2013; Stevens, 2001; Powell et al., 2015; McKenzie-Mavinga, 2004; Adetimole et al., 2005; Tinsley-Jones, 2001). It would be valuable to explore whether these experiences varied according to ethnicity or were influenced by gender-specific factors.

While Shah et al. (2012) provide valuable insights, it is important to interpret their findings in light of the diverse historical and contemporary dynamics influencing race relations across institutions and psychology disciplines (Atewologun et al., 2010). The reliance on subjective accounts introduces potential biases, and the changes in training programmes, policies and societal attitudes since 2012 may have altered the landscape. Nevertheless, recent research (Farooq et al., 2022; Brown & Mousa, 2023; Daloye, 2022) confirms

similar concerns, underscoring the persistence of barriers faced by minority groups in academia.

Amid this backdrop – and in the wake of recent events such as Brexit, COVID-19 and the killing of George Floyd – academia and psychology in particular, face mounting pressure not only to acknowledge but to interrogate the systemic racism affecting Black and ethnic minority students (Carachilo et al., 2022; Chastney et al., 2024). While racial disparities and institutional racism are acknowledged (Grzanka et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2020; Gillborn et al., 2023; Atayero & Dodzo, 2021), it remains unclear whether these issues have been fully addressed. This uncertainty reinforces the urgent need for counselling psychology to examine the concerns of its minority trainees and practitioners more deeply.

Although much of the referenced research originates in disciplines beyond counselling psychology, its insights remain highly relevant to understanding professional identity within the field. These studies also show that race remains a significant issue for many students, who often feel their colour is either ignored or pathologised. Consequently, some struggle to resist or reclaim their identity, risking being defined solely by their experiences and race. For Black counselling psychologists in training, incorporating reflexivity and self-awareness into their education becomes challenging when they encounter racism – whether overt or subtle – within training institutions. These encounters shape their training experiences and influence the development of their professional identity, as well as its relational dynamics with clients and colleagues.

These experiences must be seen not only as institutional issues but as reflections of broader structural inequalities embedded in psychology. Dominant therapeutic frameworks, often grounded in White, Eurocentric assumptions, can marginalise or misrepresent the experience of Black trainees (Fernando, 2017; Moodley & Palmer, 2006). Such frameworks risk reproducing exclusionary norms, making it difficult for marginalised voices to engage meaningfully with the profession or see themselves reflected in psychological theory and practice.

Counselling Psychology

Counselling psychology bridges the eclectic theories of counselling and psychotherapy with the foundational principles of psychology (Strawbridge, 2010). It combines psychological science and therapeutic philosophies, resulting in a unique professional identity that is both scientifically rigorous (Hammersley, 2003) and rooted in postmodern thought (Moore & Rae, 2009). However, the

fusion of two seemingly opposing disciplines can make it difficult to define a clear professional identity, creating tension for both the profession and the diverse settings in which it is practised (Warwick, 2022; Gazzola et al., 2011; Mrdjenovich & Moore, 2004; Moller, 2011; Brady-Amoon & Keefe-Cooperman, 2017; Kasket & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Neimeyer & Diamond, 2001). The professional identity of the counselling psychologist can be blurred, as the profession's integrative stance can lead to ambiguity. This may enable the incorporation of practices from other psychological disciplines or facilitate integration into other fields (Idowu, 2017; Moore et al., 2009; Vasquez & Bingham, 2012). This ongoing fluidity presents a challenge for counselling psychology as it strives to establish a clear and consistent professional identity while maintaining its distinctive blend of psychological science and therapeutic philosophies (Palmqvist, 2016).

Professional Identity

With the ongoing debate surrounding the professional identity of counselling psychology, a range of articles has been published calling for a deeper interrogation of the profession's defining features (Strawbridge, 2010; Blair, 2010; Moller, 2011). This discourse has gained urgency in light of recent socio-political events – notably the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic – which have not only reshaped the delivery of psychological services but also foregrounded systemic inequalities that intersect with psychologists' sense of professional identity. For minority psychologists, these events have amplified long-standing challenges relating to systemic racism and health disparities, compounding the psychological demands of their work (Wyatt et al., 2020).

While Lavalley and Johnson (2020) demonstrate a clear association between race-based discrimination and heightened occupational distress among Black Americans, O'Connor et al. (2021) highlight the pandemic's disproportionate burden on marginalised professionals, including disruptions to service provision and heightened exposure to client trauma. These perspectives converge in underscoring the structural barriers that shape both professional functioning and identity formation. Yet, a notable gap remains. Flores et al. (2023) argue persuasively for embedding cultural responsiveness and social justice into professional practice; however, they offer limited consideration of how such principles can be operationalised within the constraints of institutional systems that often perpetuate inequality.

This tension between the humanistic ethos traditionally associated with counselling psychology and the socio-political realities that constrain its practice complicates attempts to define a cohesive professional identity (Mrdjenovich & Moore, 2004). Theoretical accounts, such as Mrdjenovich and Moore's (2004) emphasis on the alignment of identity with professional norms and values, offer a useful starting point but risk underestimating the disruptive influence of systemic forces. Developmental models of identity (Becher & Trowler, 2001) similarly contribute valuable insights into the evolving nature of professional roles, yet they tend to present identity as a relatively linear process, neglecting the destabilising impact of socio-political upheaval.

More recent contributions, such as those by Freeman and Kocak (2023) and Flores et al. (2023), highlight the role of cultural responsiveness and social justice in sustaining a relevant and ethically grounded professional identity. While these approaches mark a critical shift towards embedding social context within identity discourse, questions remain about their integration with established theoretical frameworks and their capacity to address the systemic barriers evidenced by earlier studies. Taken together, the literature suggests that any contemporary account of counselling psychologists' professional identity must grapple not only with theoretical coherence but also with the profession's embeddedness in unequal socio-political landscapes, a dimension that earlier conceptualisations have largely overlooked.

Bruss and Kopala (1993) contend that professional identity is inseparable from personal identity, warning that isolating the two risks compromising values and undermining integrity. Ball (1972) offers a useful framework by distinguishing 'situated' identity – a flexible self-presentation shaped by specific contexts – from 'substantive' identity, a stable core linked to self-perception (Day et al., 2013). Substantive identity, influenced by interpersonal interaction (Cazer & Creary, 2016), shapes both self-concept and the dynamic integration of personal and professional identities (Verling, 2014; Cazer et al., 2016).

In exploring professional identity construction in counselling psychology, Moore and Rae (2009) examined narratives from eight chartered counselling psychologists and found a dichotomy between those who positioned themselves as 'outsiders' and those identifying as 'mavericks', the latter often claiming greater autonomy but encountering power struggles and reputational risks. While both studies shed light on racialised experiences, they still underplay the structural and political factors shaping identity construction. Yip (2020) extended this work by showing how ethnic diversity adds further complexity, with minority

practitioners facing compounded barriers. Ngadjui et al. (2024) deepen the discussion by identifying the influence of misogyny and socio-economic disadvantage, underscoring that identity negotiation is shaped by intersecting forms of inequality.

Gazzola et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of an integrated self but stop short of directly addressing identity construction. Their work nevertheless highlights the impact of internal conflict and power dynamics, themes echoed in Abebe and Harper (2019), who call for a deeper analysis of intersecting identities. Yet these studies still overlook the broader political context, limiting their capacity to fully explain identity formation under systemic constraint.

Goodbody and Burn (2011) used narrative analysis to explore identity development among Black and Asian chartered psychologists, finding that some participants experienced imposed identities rooted in social hierarchy, while others navigated these power structures with agency. However, many reported narratives of powerlessness, particularly as marginalised professionals (Watson, 2004). These findings align with Ragaven (2018) and point to the importance of recognising how race, social status and gender intersect in shaping identity (D'Mello et al., 2020).

Marshall et al. (2021) highlight the additional pressures on ethnic minorities, including microaggressions and the need to balance cultural authenticity with professional conformity. Sue and Sue (2012) similarly examine how cultural expectations influence professional identity in Asian populations. While both studies shed light on racialised experiences, they still underplay the structural and political factors shaping identity construction.

Although much of the empirical focus remains outside of counselling psychology, this emphasis risks bias towards values rooted in pathology and diagnosis. Daloye's (2022) study of minority trainee counselling psychologists addresses this gap, showing how a lack of inclusivity and representation shapes belonging and identity development. While some scholars advocate embedding social justice into counselling psychology (Daloye, 2022), others – notably Pugh and Coyle (2000) – caution that constructing an 'equivalent' identity for legitimacy can inadvertently reproduce the same systemic issues it seeks to challenge.

Scheel et al. (2018) and Deblaere et al. (2019) argue for confronting systemic oppression, including White supremacy, within counselling psychology to enable genuine equity. This resonates with Goodbody and Burn's (2011)

findings on the challenges faced by marginalised professionals and reinforces the need for systemic change.

However, as the discourse continues, the literature reveals a persistent gap between theoretical models of professional identity and the experiences of counselling psychologists navigating systemic inequities. Future conceptualisations must not only integrate intersectional and socio-political perspectives, but also challenge the institutional structures that limit equity, inclusivity and professional authenticity.

The Person Within the Profession

An individual's racial identity is central to who they are and therefore pivotal in shaping professional identity (Verling, 2014). Given the importance of race in identity formation, Tinsley-Jones (2001) argues that, while psychology has made progress in considering diversity, it has paid far less attention to the racism embedded within the structures of psychological theory, practice and policy. This oversight is reflected both in the persistent lack of diversity within the profession and in the marginalised position that race occupies in the therapeutic field. Tinsley-Jones further asserts that for therapists of colour, race can be difficult to address when tackling issues of racism because the topic becomes emotionally charged for both minority and majority groups.

Although counselling psychology has a strong tradition of engaging with identity and critical self-reflection (Woolfe et al., 2003), most research on the identity of Black and ethnic minority psychologists has originated from quantitative studies in organisational, educational and clinical psychology and from counselling in the US. Much of the literature also focuses on trainees' experiences or reflective papers from minority psychologists (Iwamasa, 1996; Odusanya, 2016). Accounts from both trainees and qualified practitioners depict a long and complex journey shaped by perceived indifference and its effects within the wider societal context.

For example, Lo's (2010) reflective account describes her emotional journey within a predominantly White institution, where colleagues and students often displayed ignorance about the impact of racism. She recounts how her racial identity evolved; first through a false assumption of equality, then through the realisation of segregation and internal conflict in her search for meaning and a cohesive ethnic and professional identity. Lo felt she had to prove herself as deserving of a professional role before ultimately finding comfort in reconnecting with her ethnic culture, which she drew on to strengthen her personal and professional identity. Her account illustrates the internal conflicts and identity

negotiations faced by minority psychologists, echoing the earlier reflections of Yazar (1996).

Similarly, Joseph (1995) describes developing defensive strategies to cope with racism from patients and the isolation caused by colleagues who either ignored or trivialised her experiences. For Joseph, this process involved redefining herself first as a clinician and then as a Black woman. Afuape (2004) likewise used her racial identity as a cornerstone of her professional identity, acknowledging the challenges of being recognised as 'different' and navigating a profession often reluctant to engage meaningfully with issues of race.

Although these are individual reflective accounts rather than large-scale empirical studies, they offer valuable insights into the experiences of racial and professional identity development. They reveal the paradoxical relationship between these identities: while racial identity can be a source of strength for navigating professional spaces, it can also highlight differences within systems that marginalise minority voices. These narratives demonstrate the tension between maintaining cultural authenticity and conforming to mainstream professional norms, exposing the social and political dimensions often neglected in discussions of professional identity.

Van Laer and Janssens (2017) extend this perspective in their study of 26 ethnic minority professionals, exploring subtle forms of workplace discrimination. They identified three main strategies for managing discourses of ethnicity: rejecting, redefining and adopting available subject positions. Participants navigated a constant negotiation between power and resistance, reflected in the question, 'Who can I be at work?' Resistance and compliance often coexisted, allowing individuals to challenge yet simultaneously reproduce institutional power structures. However, these negotiations involved trade-offs between ethnic identity, professional identity and social positioning. Crocker and Quinn (2000) argue that strategies to protect one's identity cannot occur in isolation but require dialogue with others – what social representation theory calls 'dialectical understanding', where psychological and political connections are examined collectively to reshape social relations (Howarth, 2006).

Like Rhead et al. (2021) and Gazzola et al. (2011), Van Laer and Janssens (2017) expose how institutional structures normalise and legitimise subtle racism, constraining who participants believe they can be in the workplace. Yet, while their study offers a nuanced look at structural forces, it underexplores how individuals actively manage these constraints or negotiate

the interplay between different aspects of identity. This limitation highlights a recurring gap in the literature: the overemphasis on structural oppression without equal attention to the agency and strategies of those navigating it.

Nonetheless, the study underscores how racial identity can become a dominant classificatory marker, often overshadowing other facets of selfhood. This dynamic creates a specific power relationship between majority and minority groups, forcing individuals to bargain with their racial identity to assert their professional identity. Identity negotiation, therefore, is not purely personal but shaped by broader systemic inequalities.

Patel (2011) and the BPS's (2020) Declaration on equality, diversity and inclusion further illustrate how institutional structures and dominant cultural norms shape the career development of Black and ethnic minority psychologists in the UK. These studies highlight the intersecting effects of race, culture and professional identity, showing that systemic barriers are not only externally imposed but also embedded within the profession's normative assumptions. Identity formation becomes a site of tension, requiring constant negotiation between authenticity and institutional expectations. This reinforces the need for structural interventions that move beyond diversity rhetoric to genuine, embedded inclusion.

For Black counselling psychologists entering a professional climate still shaped by historical ideologies of race and categorisation, the challenges are twofold: constructing a professional identity and developing strategies to navigate systemic barriers. While some progress has been made in acknowledging these issues, there remains a critical need for safe and supportive spaces where racial concerns can be discussed openly. Creating such spaces fosters dialogue, enhances belonging and supports professional growth. Ultimately, this requires the profession to move beyond tokenistic diversity statements towards building an inclusive environment that fully integrates and values the multiple identities of its practitioners (Odusanya et al., 2017).

The Positioning of Racial Hierarchy

Racial hierarchy refers to a system of power relations that positions certain racial groups at the top while marginalising and oppressing others based on perceived race or ethnicity. This profoundly affects individuals' lives, shaping their identities and influencing how they engage with the social world.

Historically, people of colour and White people have had vastly different experiences of racial hierarchy. For many Black individuals, both historical and

contemporary social traumas have left a cumulative legacy that continues to shape lived experiences and identity development (Fernando, 1996). This legacy, now internalised and institutionalised, perpetuates unequal power relations, producing disparities in health, education, employment and other critical areas of life. Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'cultural capital' further illuminates how these power relations extend to the valuation and privileging of particular cultural norms and forms of knowledge, thereby reinforcing the structural inequalities produced by racial hierarchies (Huan, 2019).

In response to such inequalities and internalised power differentials, scholars in psychology have developed theories of identity development that explicitly consider the role of race and racial hierarchy. Influential contributions include Cross's (1971/1995) model of racial identity development, Atkinson et al.'s (1998) work on racial identity and mental health, Helms's (1995) racial identity theory, Sue and Sue's (1990) exploration of racial identity in counselling and Phinney's (1989) research on racial identity and academic achievement. Collectively, these frameworks provide conceptual tools for understanding how social groups – including Black, ethnic minority and White individuals – process and negotiate their identities.

Cross's model outlines four stages of racial identity development: preencounter, encounter, immersion/emersion and internalisation/commitment. In the pre-encounter stage, individuals may hold unexamined beliefs about their racial group and its position in society. During the encounter stage, they become aware of the ways racism affects their lives and identities. In the immersion/emersion stage, individuals explore their racial identity more deeply, often seeking role models and cultural connections to strengthen their sense of self. Finally, in the internalisation/commitment stage, racial identity is integrated into a broader sense of self, alongside other aspects of identity such as professional identity, gender, sexuality and class (Worrell et al., 2023).

While Cross's model remains widely used, it has also been criticised for oversimplifying the dynamic and context-dependent nature of racial identity. Other frameworks offer complementary perspectives, yet they too face limitations. Atewologun and Singh (2010), for instance, caution that such models can over-categorise people's experiences and fail to capture the diversity that exists both within and across racial groups. Some scholars argue that these frameworks risk inadvertently reinforcing racial stereotypes and reproducing the very hierarchies they aim to dismantle (Ngadjui, 2022).

Despite these limitations, such theories remain a common starting point for examining the intersections of race, identity and well-being (Stone-Sabali et al., 2018). Crucially, acknowledging the role of racial hierarchy enables a more nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate multiple, intersecting identities – including racial and professional identity – within systems that continue to be shaped by unequal power relations. Developing more critically reflexive and contextually sensitive models is therefore essential for dismantling entrenched hierarchies and promoting equity in both psychological theory and practice.

Power Relations in Social Structures

To understand how racial and professional identities are formed and managed in a specific social context, it is essential to examine the role of power and how it operates in language (Paulraj, 2016; Totton, 2009; Martin et al., 1998). This is because individual and collective identities, such as racial and professional identity, are shaped and reshaped through language and its use (Wodak, 2012) as identities are influenced by social and political relations (Sindic et al., 2015) and the Eurocentric value system that organises disciplines like psychology and ultimately, counselling psychology.

Understanding racial categories requires making sense of their meaning through language, which establishes what is considered normal, creates categorisations and sets boundaries (Wodak, 2012). Power relations are expressed through language and behaviour (Sindic et al., 2015). Language and power share a dynamic relationship that fosters elitism and asymmetric relations, as explored by Dreyfus and Rabinow in 1983. This dynamic leads to a discourse marked by division and dominance, as Fernando (2017) notes, distinguishing between the powerful and the powerless and setting the minority apart from the majority. Therefore, power shapes discourse in a system of oppression that operates through social disciplines to shape individuals' thoughts and behaviours to conform to a particular norm. Discriminatory ideologies justify and rationalise exploitation and inequalities, perpetuating microaggressions and reinforcing bipolar division in discourse (Zhang & Kirby, 2024). In Foucauldian terms, language becomes a discourse that systematically forms the objects spoken of. Rather than simply identifying objects, discourse creates them and, in doing so, conceals their true meaning, influencing people's views (Hook, 2007; Foucault, 1980). Racial categories are defined and redefined to reflect the power relations between groups and maintain socially constructed racial hierarchies and systemic inequalities (Shah, 2012; Howarth, 2006; Lago & Thompson, 1996).

Foucault's work on discipline and punishment offers insight into how power shapes discourse through institutions like prisons. According to Foucault, power is not solely suppressive and coercive; it also operates through social disciplines that shape individual behaviours and thoughts to conform to a particular norm. This analysis shows how power operates within language and discourse to create and perpetuate social norms that oppress marginalised groups. This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding power dynamics within institutions like psychology and academia, where power influences the behaviours and thoughts of students and professionals, often promoting a specific norm. Consequently, Black counselling psychologists may experience pressure to assimilate into dominant cultural norms. This dynamic reflects respectability politics, which pressures marginalised professionals to adopt dominant standards of professionalism and frames legitimacy as conditional upon suppressing aspects of their identity (Ngadjui, 2022). Such pressures do not create genuine belonging but rather an illusion of inclusion, restricting Black psychologists' ability to challenge oppressive behaviour.

Power operates within discourse to shape realities without appearing to do so (Kang, 2015), granting some groups or individuals privileges while disempowering others. Microaggressions are examples of the automatic or unconscious, subtle, normalised forms of behaviours that perpetuate damaging racial stereotypes and insults towards people of colour (Sue et al., 2009a/2019; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Stone-Sabali et al., 2018). Racist ideologies that justify and rationalise exploitation and inequalities create power differentials that serve as the foundation for microaggressions (Watson, 2004; Wade, 2004). Such discourse produces a bipolar division where the powerful dominate the powerless, and the minority are set apart from the majority.

An example of power operating within discourse is the concept of colour blindness, discussed earlier in this paper. This rhetorical strategy denies the experiences of marginalised groups while promoting the idea that ignoring race and ethnicity is the best way to avoid being perceived as prejudiced. However, in doing so, this approach overlooks the historical and contemporary power differentials between racial groups and fails to recognise systemic racism, thereby perpetuating it. By denying the experiences of marginalised groups and their oppression, these rhetorical strategies limit their ability to address the root cause of their oppression and transform social systems (Osman et al., 2024; Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Institutional Biases

Although theories such as critical race theory, which seek to understand how White supremacy as a legal, cultural and political condition is reproduced and maintained (De La Garza et al., 2016), or social identity theory, which provides an instrumental conceptual framework in social psychology (Brown, 2000), can be used to investigate institutional biases including racism, common elements like discourse, power and identity frequently appear. Both theories emphasise how power structures within institutions shape individual and group identities. Critical race theory, for example, highlights how institutional policies, practices and discourses often perpetuate and reinforce the interests of dominant groups, while social identity theory emphasises how individuals construct their sense of self within these power structures. The fundamental idea is that institutional biases are bounded by power (Alleyne, 2004; 2005; Helms, 1995), often reflecting the interests of powerful societal groups. In educational institutions, for example, these dynamics can be seen in the allocation of resources, the control over curriculum development and policies and the construction of knowledge about history, culture, theories and societal values, which can often privilege dominant narratives and perspectives while marginalising the experiences and perspectives of minorities.

These dynamic produces binary and distorted roles of the expert who perpetuates institutional authority and the non-expert who accommodates it (Benwell & Stokoe, 2013). These roles fail to capture the complexity and diversity of human experiences and identities, thus contributing to institutional bias and discrimination. This dynamic, therefore, creates systems where certain groups' voices and experiences are devalued, leading to a lack of representation and inclusion.

Foucault (1977) argues that institutions significantly shape people's lives by exerting power over them. This institutional power operates both from the top down and from the bottom up, meaning that individuals within institutions can help sustain and create new forms of oppression. Institutional biases, as a form of oppression, are directly linked to these power relations. Therefore, combating institutional biases requires a comprehensive approach to changing institutional structures, policies and practices to dismantle the power relations that sustain them (Foucault, 1977).

The Institute of Race Relations (2008) defines institutional racism as 'that which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and

culture of public or private institutions – reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn' (Kenny & Briner, 2010, p.349).

While institutional biases have typically been associated with affecting the progression of minority groups (Kenny et al., 2010), it is essential to acknowledge that minority groups can also engage in cultural oppression towards others, perpetuating the values of a dominant culture to which they have been subjected (Sue, 2008). These systemic power relations, operating both top down and bottom-up (Foucault, 1977), lead to the emergence of internal oppressors (Alleyne, 2005). This occurs when members of minority groups adopt oppressive behaviours and attitudes towards their group or other minority groups due to external experiences and fear of oppression.

Sharma (2005), an Indian-Asian female psychologist, and Lawrence (2003), a Black American male counsellor, provide personal reflective accounts of their experiences, illustrating how indifference or intolerance was embedded within their social conditioning. This led to the normalisation and pathologisation of their behaviour, devaluing other minorities (Sue, 2008). While it is important to recognise the limitations of these personal accounts, as they could reflect individual biases or subjectivities, Comas-Díaz (2000) offers further insight into this phenomenon. She refers to it as the 'cultural Stockholm syndrome' (p.1320), where members of minority groups become perpetrators of oppressive behaviours, thereby maintaining social inequalities and injustices. These inequalities are underpinned by disciplinary power, which refers to how societal norms and structures enforce and perpetuate these inequalities (Foucault, 1977; Lavoie, 2014).

While counselling psychology encourages reflective practice and critical self-awareness, counselling psychologists must embrace their cultural identities to avoid inadvertently reinforcing broader societal attitudes and actions. As products of cultural conditioning, Black counselling psychologists can also be susceptible to engaging in racial biases, particularly if they have unresolved conflicts that serve as defence mechanisms against self-awareness. This becomes particularly important, considering numerous environments fail to offer active support for individuals seeking to explore their cultural identities, intensifying these conflicts (Hanson et al., 2021). Consequently, counselling psychologists must embrace their own cultural identities to recognise and overcome biases, which are not separate from internalised racism (Collins, 2000; Bivens, 1995). Institutionalised biases play a role as oppressive racial groups adopt attitudes and behaviours that reinforce dominant cultural norms, thereby

maintaining power dynamics among dominant and minority groups (Suavansri, 2016).

Several studies shed light on the effect of institutional biases and racism in psychology. One of these, by Benitez and Casad-Kehoe (2019), suggests that an effective solution to institutional biases and cultural oppression may be to decolonise institutions like psychology (Gillborn et al., 2023). This requires directly challenging and removing the Eurocentric and colonialist foundations in many parts of the discipline. The goal is to create an environment that is more inclusive and fairer. However, critics say that removing a field's Eurocentric base is impractical, even if it sounds like a promising idea, and that implementing and sustaining such fundamental changes would take much work.

Jackson and Ross-Sheriff (2016) analysed the impact of stereotype threat on the limited progression of African-American women in counselling psychology. Stereotype threat refers to the impact of negative stereotypes on individual performance, limiting opportunities for personal and professional development. Carter et al. (2018) explored the phenomenon of oppression, depression and suicidal ideation among immigrant and minority youth. Their research highlights the real-world impact of institutional bias and racism, illustrating the need for further research and interventions to address both the individual and systemic factors associated with institutional oppression.

Psychodynamic Theory and the Perception of Identity

While psychodynamic theory emphasises the developmental process of infants and early childhood experiences in shaping individual identity and perceptions, it is just one approach to understanding development. Other theoretical frameworks, such as behavioural, cognitive, or humanistic theories, offer a unique perspective on shaping individual identity and perceptions. Therefore, evaluating various theoretical frameworks and approaches is crucial for comprehensively understanding human development. Each offers unique insights and perspectives on shaping individual identities in diverse contexts.

Psychodynamic theory emphasises the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping an individual's development and perception of self and others. The complex bond between mother and infant lays the groundwork for later life and relationships (Pretorius, 2014). Early representations of the self and others influence how one responds and acts in social interactions (Fletcher, 2008). Experiences of discrimination and prejudice, for instance, can produce moments of trauma that threaten intimacy and attachment (Straker, 2006). Such

trauma may lead to the development of a false self (Winnicott, 1989), which conceals the true self from further harm (Pretorius, 2014). This can result in countertransference, especially if the counselling psychologists have issues with prejudice, discrimination and/or guilt. When transference and countertransference intertwines, a vicious cycle can perpetuate negative patterns in both professional and personal relationships (Comas-Díaz, 2000).

Broadly, psychodynamic theory highlights the role of early experiences in shaping individual identity and relationships. However, it is important to recognise its limitations in fully addressing external factors like societal oppression and institutional biases. To delve deeper into these issues, understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by marginalised groups, such as Black and minority individuals, is crucial. This requires an awareness of various theoretical frameworks and an appreciation for the diverse circumstances in which identity is formed. For example, Black and ethnic minority individuals encounter additional obstacles such as racial prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping and intergenerational trauma that profoundly influence their sense of self and others (Greene et al., 2006).

Negotiating Identity

Due to the negative experiences of discrimination and stereotypes, some Black and ethnic minority individuals develop coping strategies to navigate their identities within institutions characterised by power differentials. This phenomenon aligns with the cultural contract theory, which suggests that identity negotiation occurs between the self and the external world. As a relational construct, identity entails a natural negotiation process and paradoxes (TingToomey, 1999) as individuals seek validation while protecting their vulnerability and navigating the meaning of relationships or environments. Anastasi (2021) highlights the complexities of this dual role, emphasising the ongoing negotiation required to maintain a coherent professional identity and personal well-being.

Identity negotiation involves individuals' choices to secure their self-image in social interactions (Jackson, 2002; Swann et al., 2009). However, some individuals, particularly Black professionals constantly navigate contexts where a cultural contract is expected (Harris, 2007; Collins, 2000; Goffman, 1963), resulting in racially and socially asymmetrical identities (Jackson, 2010) and negotiated racialised identities amidst cultural differences and racial hierarchies (Jackson, 2002). This places Black professionals in a difficult position where their

racial identity is often prescribed by societal constructs rather than being self-owned (Odusany, 2016). Consequently, they face expectations to assimilate into the dominant White culture, which may lead to cultural dissonance and a sense of alienation (Cox, 1993).

Bell (1990) addresses the challenges encountered by Black professional women, emphasising their need to operate in a bicultural world. These women must navigate a predominantly White-dominated professional environment while simultaneously preserving their racial and ethnic identity. Supporting this perspective, authors such as Showunmi (2023), Dixon and Okoli (2023), Johnson and Johnson (2024) and Barrett, Cercero and Johnson-Bailey (2003) argue that Black professional women face unique challenges that necessitate a delicate balance among their work, gender and racial identities; concepts that fall under the framework of intersectionality. These studies underscore the importance of acknowledging and addressing the complex intersection of identity when exploring the negotiation of professional lives by marginalised groups.

Harris (2007) draws on Black feminist thought and the cultural contract theory (CCT) to reflect on her experiences of identity negotiation as a doctoral candidate and as a professional in a predominantly White institution. Her narrative highlights the imposition of cultural contracts and the challenges of navigating identity as a Black individual, as her identity was imposed on her rather than owned by her, forcing her to live a 'double life' (p. 57). Her framework for ascribing how she navigated this process involved introspection and, depending on a variety of contextual cues and variables, choosing between the three typologies of CCT.

While Harris's narrative provided insight into how she navigated her identity, it is somewhat simplistic as it does not examine how her differences affected her relationships and the intersections involved in the process. Therefore, there is a need for a more critical examination of these issues to better understand the complexities of identity negotiation for Black and ethnic minority individuals. Other studies, such as those by Harlow (2003), Atewologun et al. (2010) and Odusanya et al., (2017), further underscore the functionality of race in professional identity and the associated challenges, including psychological difficulties, identity crises and conflict.

Ngadjui et al. (2024), Galliher et al. (2017) and Atewologun (2020) shed light on the intersectionality of identity and the challenges encountered by Black and ethnic minority people in negotiating their identities. Galliher et al. (2017) examine race, gender and sexuality in adolescents' identity development,

highlighting the unique challenges posed by societal messages and stereotypes. However, focusing solely on adolescence means that the research did not explore how these challenges evolve throughout adulthood, particularly in diverse situations such as academia and the work environment.

Hebl et al.'s (2020) study focused on how Black and ethnic minority individuals navigate their racial identity in the workplace and how power dynamics affect their authenticity and career outcomes. While this research provides valuable insights into the workplace experiences of these groups, its narrow concentration on reactions to racial authenticity significantly limited its scope. By overlooking the complex interplay of intersecting identities such as gender, class and sexuality that also shape individual experiences in professional environments, it fails to consider these broader dimensions of identity and falls short of delivering a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Black and ethnic minority individuals in the workplace. Likewise, it undermines the multifaceted nature of authentic self-expression in diverse professional settings.

This narrow focus raises critical questions about the difficulties researchers may encounter when exploring intersectionality, including the risks of oversimplifying complex identities and the potential for reinforcing stereotypes or biases.

Conclusion

This Literature Review underscores the enduring challenges and emotional struggles experienced by Black and ethnic minority trainees and professionals as they navigate the intricate intersections of race and professional identity. While it is essential to recognise the diversity within the Black and ethnic minority communities, research consistently demonstrates the profound impact of the intersection of race and professional identity, highlighting significant challenges stemming from sociocultural structures and political categories. As individuals attempt to integrate into environments that discredit or disregard their cultural norms, values and practices, they are forced to navigate a complex dichotomy reflective of broader power struggles and obstacles faced by Black and ethnic minority trainees and professionals in asserting their identities amidst systemic biases and inequalities.

Overall, identity negotiation poses significant challenges for individuals from the Black and ethnic minority communities. However, a deeper understanding of these complexities and how they affect specific situations, such

as training and professional relationships, is needed. A comprehensive understanding of the intersection between race and professional identity requires a closer examination of the multifaceted process through which individuals navigate their racial, gender and professional identities. This review emphasises the need for further research to improve our understanding of these complexities, guide policies and practices to promote and understand diversity and provide support for individuals from marginalised communities as they navigate the complex terrain in their professional and personal lives.

Relevance

This review highlights the challenges faced by BAME trainees and professionals in navigating their racial and professional identities, which have critical implications for the field of counselling psychology. While research specifically on Black and ethnic minority professionals within UK counselling psychology is limited, studies in related fields like clinical psychology address the reconciliation of diverse identities. As the professional body for counselling psychology, the BPS has emphasised the importance of diversity and inclusion as a fundamental ethical principle. Therefore, further research is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of how Black and ethnic minority counselling psychologists perceive and negotiate their racial and professional identities. Such research will inform the development of culturally informed ethical practices and promote greater diversity and inclusivity within the profession.

It aligns with the BPS's mandate to critically engage discrimination and shift the narrative on race, ethnicity and difference in research and practice. By gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity development, counselling psychologists can reflect on their biases and assumptions, contributing to a more reflective practice better equipped to support the diverse needs of the profession and the wider society. At a time of increased awareness of issues surrounding race and racism, this research is crucial for counselling psychologists to promote equality and social justice within the communities they serve.

Methodology

Aim

This study explores how Black UK counselling psychologists construct and talk about their racial and professional identities in professional relationships. This included identifying the construction of social behaviours, how these social constructs are experienced, how attitudes surrounding identities, both race and

professional, are understood, what positions are mobilised when constructing these identities, and their implications, if any.

Method

Qualitative methodologies tend to seek descriptions and explanations of their inquiry. They emphasise researcher reflexivity and subjectivity. Rather than trying to discover causal and effect relationships, their knowledge comes about through social relations and value systems within research, making their research a social process (King, 2004; Woolgar, 1996).

With the lack of research in counselling psychology by Black counselling psychologists, this methodology favoured this line of inquiry, as a qualitative methodology interprets the contextual factors that are relevant to the research question while implicitly making aware the assumptions that are available to members of this social group and the inquirer (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The transparency of the researcher within qualitative research and the relationship between researcher and subject made this approach ideal, as it draws attention to the closeness of researcher and subject while revealing rich and reflective data in contrast to the fixed, reliable data resulting from quantitative inquiry (Bryman, 1988).

Epistemological Position

Epistemology has different perspectives, dependent upon an author's orientation (Scotland, 2012). Auerswald (1985) defines epistemology as a set of pending rules defining reality or thinking about thinking, while Keeney (1983) argues that it is the force behind action and cognition. According to Benjamin (1983) and Crotty (1998), all thinking is embedded in epistemology as it reflects the rules that we use to look at and make sense of the world (Van Niekerk, 2014; Al-Saadi, 2014). Bateson (1979) argues that one cannot claim to have no epistemology, as all descriptions and assumptions are based on theories of how to make descriptions. Therefore, every description and assumption is based on or implicitly contains a theory of how to describe knowledge. For this reason, all theories illuminate what the inquirer assumes about the world, their relationship between the phenomenon and the known, and a moral stance towards the world and the self in the world as the researcher (Van Niekerk, 2014; Hughey, 2010). These are combined to add a caveat to the nature of research, how it is acquired, how it is communicated and how others understand it (Cohen et al., 2007).

As something that is inextricably entwined in research, Manicas (2009) argues that epistemological candidness in research is vital. Therefore, assumptions should be transparent and the inquirer reflexive about the object of investigation and their position in the inquiry, as this crucial element of research lends itself to the unique social relations evident in the context at hand and the causal relationships attached to the inquirer and the social relations of the phenomena.

According to Polkinghorne (1983), academic psychologists have forever been entangled in a methodological debate characterised by epistemological differences, the primary issue centring on the type of knowledge obtained by the different epistemological stances. He noted that inquirers who subscribe to the philosophy of positivism favour research methods that are concerned with discovering an 'objective truth' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). On the other side of the debate, there are those – interpretive-subjectivists – who argue that the study of psychology should focus on the unique sphere of meaningful experience, thus subscribing to a position that argues that there are no single truths (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Scotland, 2012).

Though this research recognises that different epistemological positions offer a range of diverse perspectives from which to consider the research question, the epistemological assumptions that I set out herein reflect my view and understanding of the world and my lived experiences as a Black woman. I do not believe that I can stand outside my research. These assumptions inform the social phenomena under inquiry, which are largely shaped by social rules and governed by historical and cultural ties. Such ties act as channels through which narratives are produced and reproduced narratives that both shape and influence the perception of identities (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Taking on a social constructionist stance, this inquiry suggests that each person's world is comprised of social groups, beginning with the family and extending beyond. According to social constructionists, individuals construct their reality through discourses of the social groups to which they belong. The theory of social constructionism reframes the study of human processes from a social context. In this way, social constructionists bring a different perspective in which reality is cultivated and constructed through discourse and language. Here, language is more than just a way of relating to people. Instead, people 'exist' in language. Thus, the focus is not simply on the individual but rather on the social interaction in which discourse is generated, sustained and abandoned (Gergen, 1991/1994), which, according to Burr (2003), makes it possible for people to see

and experience the world in a certain way. Here, discourse is not just a conversation but rather a tool that produces a meaning that informs how we see the world, thus producing our knowledge of the world and, consequently, the possibilities and limitations for how people can (re)act in the world. With that in mind, language is underlined as creating reality rather than reflecting it. Consequently, meaning is understood and made in social relationships. Hence, identities can be understood to be socially constructed and carry variable social meanings entrenched in cultural locations (Foucault, 1980).

Here, we challenge the view that knowledge is created from an 'objective, unbiased observation of the world' (Burr, 2003, p.3). Instead, it is seen as an artefact of culture and is constructed between people through language. Therefore, meanings are not fixed but renegotiated (Wetherell, 2001). In the world of social constructionism, there is no one truth to be discovered. Therefore, this research may be understood differently depending on the time, place and inquirer.

This view carries implications, as the meaning that emerges from this study remains open to reinterpretation. Similarly, if all 'truths' are equally valid, this leads to an unprincipled position of 'anything goes', where even an oppressive state (for example) can be treated or seen as a construction (Burr, 1995, p.3). However, McGhee (2001) contends that social truths ought to be evaluated by their consequences. Thus, this research defends and acknowledges that discourses have real-world effects, as demonstrated by the impact of legal frameworks on marginalised identities.

Since meaning is created through language, the researcher acknowledges that others might pursue different routes of inquiry or prioritise different themes. For this reason, the researcher makes clear that at each stage of the inquiry, all interpretation is influenced by assumptions and interactions; therefore, its interpretation is unique and a valid reflection of one's experience – one that may initiate dialogue, debate, understanding and further research.

In psychology, different social constructionist theorists take stances influenced by their intellectual movements. This research focuses on the macrolevel in social constructionism (Burr, 2003), which is concerned with the function of discourse in the constitution of social and psychological life. Here, language is constructed as enabling, constraining and limiting what can be said by whom, where and when (Parker, 1992 in Willig, 2008). As the macro-level informs this research paper of the social constructionist perspective, the

emphasis is placed on the constructive nature of language, particularly the notion of power (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017) and how there exist socially privileged ways of talking about people or 'things' (Foucault, 1977;1980).

From this perspective, this research argues that discourse works to both construct and perpetuate the way that we, as a society, understand individuals and ways of being in society. The macro view of social constructionism determines that, as individuals in this society, we are the carriers of discourse constructed by us in a manner that society determines. Hence, identities can become changeable and multiple across the discourses that work to construct them (Willig, 2013). Observing the social constructionist epistemology from the macro-level allows us to distinguish how institutional practices and the relatively powerful in society have had more opportunity to conceptualise, construct and disseminate discourse and, based on their status, hold influence over and legitimise types of knowledge, while marginalising and oppressing other individuals who do not fall under this construction (Burr, 2015).

Therefore, this research focused on the availability of discourses, how participants construct the object or subject they speak about (Parker, 1992; Damaschin, 2014) and how they experience the world through the subject positions made available to them. This situates the study within a social constructionist framework, drawing on Foucault's (1985) work, to analyse how particular discourses are privileged over others and subsequently legitimised (Willig, 2013).

Social constructionists, like counselling psychologists, challenge the view that knowledge is solely created from objective, unbiased world observation. Therefore, individuals can be understood (to a degree) because of their social relationships and the need to maintain coherent relationships that reflect the expectations and demands of their society (Anderson, 2012). Still, while social constructionism may appear problematic to counselling psychology, as a trainee counselling psychologist, I am aware that it is impossible to dismiss the physical and individual or reduce it to discourse. Therefore, this research acknowledges 'that there can be no universal truth or absolute ethical positions' (Wetherell, 2001, p.384) and rests on the intricacy, uncertainty and doubt of human behaviour, recognising that the kind of thoughts that emerge are merely a reflection of the participants and my understanding, of which I am part.

Theoretical Framework

Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is a form of discourse analysis and a research method underpinned by the principles of social constructionism (Branson, 2013). Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault (1978), it argues that power is constituted through discourses and is implicated in what is constructed as knowledge. For example, in Foucault's work on sexuality, he illustrates how sexuality has been constructed differently by discourses throughout history (O'Farrel, 2007), which consequently has implications for how individuals behave and define themselves.

FDA focuses on the relationship between power, knowledge and language. This allows for research to critically examine how discourse shapes and is shaped by social realities, social structures, institutional frameworks and the historical context that shape identities.

Like FDA, discursive psychology delves into how language shapes individual understanding. However, its primary focus lies in unravelling how language is a tool for individuals to navigate social interaction for personal gain. Unlike FDA, which critically examines power dynamics in discourse, discursive psychology does not directly address how power operates through language, especially concerning racial and professional identities. The critical lens inherent in FDA and the social constructionist stance highlights that language communicates meaning and reinforces existing power structures. By overlooking the contextualisation of language in structures of identities, discursive psychology failed to fully consider the effect of the participants' linguistic choices in this study when addressing issues concerning their identities (Burr, 2003).

When studying issues such as the incorporation of racial and professional identities among Black counselling psychologists, FDA provides a valuable analytical framework for uncovering underlying power dynamics and dominant narratives and understanding the complexities of identity formation in a historical and broader socio-political context. By employing the FDA, this research emphasises how power operates through discourse. This is particularly relevant when studying Black counselling psychologists, as their social positioning in professions such as psychology is shaped by complex power dynamics influenced by dominant social structures that shape their racial identity and social reality.

These dynamics operate at the institutional level, where dominant psychological and therapeutic discourse tends to reflect White, middle-class, Western

values (Patel, 2011; Hook, 2007). Such discourse often defines what is considered normal, healthy or professional, leaving little room for culturally diverse understanding of distress, healing, or identity. Consequently, therapeutic and medical models may inadvertently marginalise or silence the experiences of Black trainees, influencing who enters the profession, who feels they belong and how identity is constructed. Recognising these discursive power structures allows for a more critical engagement with issues such as representation, inclusion and resistance in the field of counselling psychology.

When focusing on discourse, FDA looks at what kind of discourses the participants draw on when constructing discursive objects and subjects, what kind of objects and subjects are thereby constructed, and how being such objects and subjects is made available to people in their social circumstances (Willig, 2013).

The use of FDA, therefore, allows for consideration of the discursive construction of the relationship between the perceived differences in identities, what this means for each participant, how they construct themselves in these identities, what positions they adopt, the action behind this subject position and the implications, if any.

Method of Analysis

In discursive psychology, there is no single accepted method of conducting FDA (Burr, 2015). Carabine (2001) notes that the Foucauldian theory offers a philosophical lens rather than providing a methodology. The practical application of this lens depends on the individual researcher and their research and question. Several authors have, however, outlined possible procedures to guide novice discourse analysts, the most fully developed of which are by Parker (1992) and Willig (2013). Parker's approach is most closely aligned with the Foucauldian theory, including consideration of the historical and political origins of discourse and its relationship to institutions, power and ideology (Hook, 2007). In conducting my analysis, I drew on the guidelines offered by Willig's (2013) six stage analysis, as it was felt that her approach placed greater emphasis on the relationship between discourse and practice and explored the implications of discourse for individual subjectivity. Her method emphasised the individual, their use of language and what they chose to include and omit from their responses.

Willig's version of FDA was used to analyse the data, providing a structured guide influenced by Foucault's work. This method was taken as a guide to aid analysis and reflection rather than a definitive step-by-step guide, as

it provided direction, which enabled the containment of the anxiety provoked by this research and a frame on which to hang ideas and move through the research in sequential order (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

The FDA approach involves six stages, each of which will be discussed below with relevant examples from the analysis.

Stage 1: Discursive objects/constructions. The first stage involves identifying how the discursive objects — in this case, racial and professional identity — are constructed in the text. All explicit and implicit references are noted to map out how these identities are made meaningful.

Stage 2: Discourses. This stage considers how such constructions draw on wider discourses. The task is to identify which discursive resources are mobilised and how they make certain versions of reality possible

Stage 3: Action-Orientation. At this stage, the analysis examines the function of constructing identities in particular ways. The focus is on what these constructions achieve in interaction — for instance, how they justify, defend, resist, or enable specific claims.

Stage 4: Positionings. Here, the analysis considers the subject positions made available within discourses. It explores how participants are positioned and how they, in turn, position themselves and others in relation to these discourses.

Stage 5: Practices. This stage identifies the possibilities for action that discursive constructions and subject positions open up or close down. The analysis considers how these discourses shape what can be said or done, as well as what is restricted or silenced.

Stage 6: Subjectivity. Finally, this stage examines the relationships between discourse and subjectivity: 'what is "felt, thought and experienced from within particular subject positions"' (Willig, 2008, p.117). This highlights how discourse not only structure practices but also shapes lived experience*.*

Recruitment

Since Foucault's discourse analysis is not concerned with data homogeneity (Taylor & Ussher, 2001), the inclusion criteria focused on male and female counselling psychologists who self-identified as Black and were UK citizens. Selecting both male and female participants ensured a comprehensive exploration of their experiences. Foucault suggests that discourse is not merely a

reflection of reality but a constitutive force that shapes how individuals understand themselves and their experiences. Different discourses can coexist, compete and conflict; this multiplicity is essential to understanding how power operates in society, indicating that a homogeneous approach would overlook the complexity of these power dynamics. Intersectionality recognises that individual experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting identities, including race and gender. By including participants of both sexes, the research could investigate how sex intersects with race and professional identity.

The representation in the sample group fostered inclusivity by acknowledging participants' diverse perspectives and ensuring that their voices and experiences were valued. Employing a broad sample group was particularly beneficial, as it reduces the risk of insufficient sample size and addresses the existing lack of research in this area, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the participants' perspectives and needs.

It was determined that each counselling psychologist needed at least one year of post-qualification experience, as this time was deemed sufficient for socialisation in their role. This requirement would enable participants to draw on their experiences as Black counselling psychologists, allowing the research to benefit from the diverse discourses on their race and professional identity.

An advertisement poster (Appendix B) requesting research participants was placed on social media websites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. It was also emailed to administrators and managers at clinics where counselling psychologists were employed, requesting them to disseminate the recruitment sheet (Appendix C). The advert was also promoted on the Black, African and Asian therapy network group and the BPS's counselling psychology Forum – the race and culture specialist interest group – in addition to the Black and Asian counselling psychology group (BACPG). Where possible, participants were asked to forward the information about the research to fellow counselling psychologists, thus engaging the snowball effect.

Given that the validity of discourse analysis is not contingent on a specific sample size (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), it was anticipated that six to eight participants would provide adequate data for analysis. However, despite several months of advertising, only seven counselling psychologists who met the inclusion criteria expressed interest and were able to participate.

While this sample size met the methodological requirements, it also highlights broader issues concerning representation and access. The low response rate may reflect not only logistical or timing challenges but also structural barriers that continue to affect

the participation of Black individuals in psychology research. Historical exclusion, epistemic marginalisation and mistrust of academic institutions shaped by the dominance of White-centric psychological paradigms can all contribute to limited engagement (Abebe and Harper, 2019). These factors point to the need for a deeper critique of recruitment practices and how research spaces may reproduce the very inequalities they seek to investigate.

Participants for this research were registered chartered counselling psychologists who identified as Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African or Black other. Their demographic details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Gender	Ethnicity	Years post qualification
Participant 1	Male	Black Caribbean	15-20 years
Participant 2	Female	Black African	1-5 years
Participant 3	Female	Black African	20+ years
Participant 4	Female	Black Caribbean	15-20 years
Participant 5	Female	Black Caribbean	1-5 years
Participant 6	Female	Black African	10-15 years
Participant 7	Female	Black African	10-15 years

Note. The information in this table is intended to help situate the participants.

Interview Process

A schedule was devised (Appendix D) with questions designed to facilitate conversation about how the participant understood the interplay of their racial and professional identity, how work-based relationships influenced this relationship, and how they felt they needed to modify or manage their racial identity in professional identity and relationships.

Ethical approval was obtained in line with the requirements of the regulatory body for counselling psychology, and authentication was completed

before the interviews were conducted. Pseudonyms were used throughout all data collection, analysis, and discussion.

One method of data-gathering is semi-structured interviews. However, semi-structured interviews have been previously criticised for providing a relevant snapshot only in a specific context (Craven & Coyle, 2007). The justification for using this method was that, as the nature of this research was personal to each participant, this method of gathering allowed for the exploration of complex issues that could arise in the interview in a safe, private space. It was also felt that this data-gathering allowed for a space for culturally available discourse to be used (Larsson et al., 2012).

Throughout the interviews, the interviewee endeavoured to use scripted and non-scripted prompts as necessary to facilitate a flow of dialogue. On completion of the interview, the interviewee made notes of the interview and the possible non-verbal communication that took place. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed and analysed.

Revision of Interview Schedule

Notes were made after the first interview and the interviewee was asked to comment on their experience, particularly their response to the wording of the questions. Based on their response to the question and their feedback, the interview schedule was revised slightly, particularly regarding how the questions were worded. No questions were removed from the interview schedule; however, the questions were reworded (Appendix E) and broken down to encourage a flow of understanding and conversation between participant and researcher.

Ethical Considerations

The study fully adhered to the ethical guidelines of the *British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct* (BPS, 2021), the *Division of Counselling Psychology* (DCoP) *Data Protection Guidelines*, the *Health and Care Professions Council* (HCPC, 2021), and the *Data Protection Act* (2018). In addition, ethical clearance was obtained from the London Metropolitan University Ethics Committee.

Informed Consent

Before participation, information sheets were emailed to each counselling psychologist that have specified an interest in participating in this inquiry

(Appendix F). The information sheets detailed the research subject matter and its aims. It also provided information such as what to expect during participation.

Full contact details were provided for the research supervisor and me. Participants were provided with a consent form (Appendix G) and a subsequent copy of the information sheet on the interview day. Before signing the consent form, they were encouraged to discuss concerns and ask questions.

Debriefing

While every effort was made to ensure that the process of interviews was comfortable, the debriefing sheet (Appendix H) gave information for helpline numbers in case a participant felt the need for further assistance. Similarly, participants were informed of the process for withdrawing their consent to use their data in the study. Both before and after the interviews, participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the inquiry at any time during their participation.

Confidentiality

Given the nature of the inquiry, emphasis was placed on confidentiality. This included using pseudonyms for each participant and altering identifying details such as places of work. Full transcripts were not attached to the appendices to further protect the confidentiality of participants. The electronic data was stored in password-protected files and, when in paper format, in a locked filing box, in line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and Division of Counselling Psychology (DCoP).

Declaration Process

All participants were fully aware of the nature and purpose of the inquiry and how their data would be stored and used in the research.

Analytic Process

The first stage involved preparing the data. This was done by transcribing the transcripts (Appendix I) and then performing a data cleaning process (Saunders et al., 2007), whereby all transcription errors were checked and corrected. This was followed by a process of data analysis through which all of the data was uploaded onto a qualitative software (NVivo 12), which can be compared to a modern form of template analysis (Appendix J), and which enables thematic analysis (King, 2004). Traditionally, template analysis demands that textual data be structured into several meaningful codes representing

important themes in the research. NVivo essentially helped with the structuring of textual data by enabling the creation of lists of codes (Appendix K), which allowed for the organisation and even reorganising of the text into different sections that made explicit/implicit references to Black counselling psychologists or identity, professional identity, therapy, relationships and professional relationships, amongst others (Willig, 2013**).**

In the second stage of the analytic approach, close attention was paid to the differences in how the research question was talked about and constructed. This allowed for the identification of different discourses. In the analysis, several discourses were mobilised. The intersection of social identities and power dynamics, for example, saw 'race/difference' as something alienating, implying that there was an object (of which they were not part) that was unacceptable. This 'alienating' of 'difference' discourse has been identified in earlier published accounts (Valentine et al., 2012; Powell et al., 2015; Apfelbaum et al., 2008), demonstrating that students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds drew on broader cultural discourses in adopting this construction. The remainder of the analytic process then followed the process described above.

Methodological Reflexivity

In interpreting the discourses, the analysis draws on cultural knowledge. Each scholar's cultural lens informs interpretation and shapes the research process. Until now, I understood reflexivity largely as a means to manage bias by bracketing my own constructions of the topic.

This has been a difficult task. As a trainee counselling psychologist who identifies as a Black woman, I seek to implement my principles pragmatically in both practice and research. To achieve this, my reflexive practice must embody a way of being, knowing, and doing, grounded in a framework that supports critical reflection and learning.

A core tenet of discourse analysis is that language constructs knowledge and experience. The epistemology of this study therefore requires moving beyond self-observation toward critical consciousness, learning, transformation, and action within the discourses and practices that constitute the social construction of knowledge (Noble & McIlveen, 2012).

To claim that I could remain a detached observer or onlooker would ignore my prior experience, my position and the lens through which I have conducted the research. The dynamic between the participants and me evolved throughout this process and meaningfully shaped both the study and my perspective.

Notably, each participant appeared to be propelled by a distinctive narrative.

Some foregrounded personal experiences, occasionally assuming my interest; others leveraged their roles as counselling psychologists, conveying personal sentiments while maintaining a professional register. Their readiness to share, together with my inclination to listen without reservation, suggested a mutual desire for validation. However, our presumed commonality may have influenced the depth of the inquiry. On reflection, my assumptions of shared experience may have constrained my exploration of their talk; by presuming common ground, I may have overlooked subtle nuances in their accounts, thereby limiting the granularity of insight.

The fact that I hold a particular viewpoint on research will undoubtedly cause limitations to the work. However, I have sought to ensure that these preunderstandings do not unduly shape the research process.

Analysis

Overview

This chapter presents five themes that captured the participants' discourse when discussing their racial and professional identity in their professional relationships.

Identification of the Main Discourses and Sub-Discourses

Five main discourses emerged from the participants' interviews, each of which includes sub-discourses. These are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2.

Main Themes and Sub-Themes Identified in the Analysis

Main Theme	Sub-Themes
The Intersection of Social Identities and Power Dynamics	- Marginalisation in Professional Training

Modification and Negotiation of Identity	-The Subtle Nature of Workplace Racism
	-Intersecting Identities
	-The Role of Institutions in Perpetuating Racism
	- Experiences of Self-Doubt
	- Coping Mechanisms
The Professional Landscape of Identity	- Navigating Professional Identity and Social Acceptance
	-Experiences in Building a Professional Identity
	-Comparing Training and Integration: Counselling psychology vs. clinical psychology
	-Recognition challenges in the NHS
	-Solidarity and Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology
	-Counselling psychology's commitment to diversity & Inclusion
Selfhood	- Self-Reflection
	-Self-development and the Activists
The Construction of a Cohesive Identity	- Race in Context

Note. Themes and sub-themes were identified through Foucauldian discourse analysis of participants' narratives.

The Intersection of Social Identities and Power Dynamics

This discourse creates a world of dominance and oppression. Here, professional identity is understood through the perception of the self and the perception of others. In this section, identities are not isolated to those of race

and professional identity but rather at the intersection of multiple social identities that bring about systems of power and power imbalance.

The following passage illustrates Carla's training experiences in becoming a counselling psychologist. She begins with notable enthusiasm and emotional resonance, suggesting that discussing this experience unearthed strong feelings about the programme and an emotional attachment.

> The very thing, that my culture, had helped me become, you know, like as a [West African] woman oh, I'm taught that, you know, you are somebody, you know, you have a future, your hopeful, none of that worked, in that environment, it never worked, it couldn't carry me through that, you know ermm. The more I wanted to profess those things and appear as though I was confident, it was always shut down; it almost felt like, 'you can't be that person here', who are you to have that much confidence in this environment, here, so it didn't work for me. (p.17)

Carla constructs her culture as a regulator of her life and identity, and her professional identity (PI) as a trainee counselling psychologist through the lens of her [West African] Culture. Her heritage and legacy are inextricably entwined with her culture; being a ["West African woman"] not only shaped her but also profoundly influenced her subjective experience of the world and her future in it. This construction of the self is an ever-present object that she implies will carry her across all life experiences. Yet, her [West African] identity, which emphasises confidence and hope, clashes with the oppressive dynamics of the training institute. Her sense of self is constructed as undesirable and leaves Carla defenceless against what appears to be something quite imposing and dictatorial. This position leaves Carla subservient and powerless in the power relations of academia.

Carla's last phrase – "so it didn't work for me" – constructs the identity of the trainee Black counselling psychologist as one tasked with navigating their environment and resisting the oppressive academic culture that suppresses their racial and cultural identity. In this position, Carla becomes an active agent in her choices. However, her remarks hint at a personal struggle, suggesting that her position may not be universally applicable to all Black counselling psychologists.

This assertion of identity can be viewed as an assertion of agency in the trainee's position. However, it also highlights the potential limitations and prevailing dominant power relations, where institutional discourse undermines the individual's culturally constructed identities, influencing their decision-making and sense of agency in professional settings.

Nicola responds to a similar question about her training experiences to become a counselling psychologist.

> Yeah, yeah, in terms of groups where you get some, you know, onetoone support or those types of groups where you can talk about discourse, you can talk about the racism you experience. You can, you can, you know, the preferential treatment you experience. You can talk about those, those things, so it's not hard, those, those conversations are not hard to have …
>
> Interviewer: Are those, um, those conversations are maybe something that you wanted to have in, in that, in that programme?
>
> Yes, yes, yeah, yeah, programme, very much... that was difficult to access, because number one, maybe it was me unable to but where to access them or knowing that actually, who to go to, because also, there's something about when you, you start your, your, your journey and thinking, everybody knows everybody else. Everybody knows everybody else. [laughs] So you're thinking, where do I go to? What's, what's a safe space? (pp. 17-18).

Nicola describes the institution's lack of acknowledgement and inadequate preparation to understand the relational and social processes among its Black trainees. The phrase 'safe space' seems paramount in this text, suggesting underlying structural systems with distinct power dynamics. Challenging this system risks exposure, as evidenced by the fear of reprisal stemming from the notion that "everybody knows everybody else". This unspoken prescription dictates permissible discourse and its recipients, highlighting Nicola's awareness of her position as a Black trainee in the academic institution and the consequences of speaking out against racism and discrimination. This understanding aligns with Foucauldian principles of power relations, where institutional structures perpetuate social control by fostering an environment of surveillance and conformity.

Nicola's struggle to find comfort is evidenced by her preoccupation with "who to go to" and "what is a safe space?" By constructing and maintaining a technology of self-aimed at self-protection, Nicola navigates her existence in the institution in a manner consistent with her principles. However, this approach carries inherent risks, as questioning institutional norms and power relations threatens one's position and status.

Additionally, Nicola highlights a disconnect between the programme's requirements, the institution's conduct and the experience of Black counselling psychologists. The notion that 'everybody knows everybody' prompts scrutiny of how the counselling psychology profession addresses diversity and fulfils its

responsibilities to its members. If trainees feel unsafe discussing experiences of racism and preferential treatment, how might this dynamic manifest in the profession? Nicola's experiences imply the construction of a passive subjectivity, reflecting a hierarchical structure-oppressor, where members of the institute, lecturers, governing bodies (HPCC and BPS) and authority figures regulate and mould individuals' identities. This discourse underscores how institutions shape subjectivities and create barriers to inclusivity, often under the guise of promoting inclusivity while perpetuating systemic oppressive power.

Michael's (the only male participant) training experiences contrasted with those of Nicola and Carla. Reflecting on entry into counselling psychology, Michael constructs his student years as inclusive and accepting of him: 'so, it did not feel that that wasn't an anxiety for me or worry; in fact, I fitted in quite well' (p. 12). However, his use of that phrase, while perhaps unconscious, lends credit to Carla and Nicola's experiences by highlighting concerns about race and unease that other individuals, possibly women, may face when entering such environments. Here, Michael implicitly supports Nicola and Carla's narratives by acknowledging that mainstream society can be rejecting of him and his reality as a Black man. However, he also recognises the potential divergence in experiences between minority men and minority women.

Both Nicola and Carla construct their identities as marginalised factors in their experiences, highlighting the significance of institutional discourse in shaping their sense of self and their attitudes towards inclusion. Michaels attempts to distance himself from the topic of race, but his acknowledgement of the possible anxiety around race reflects more the nuanced understanding of the relationship between discourse and subjectivity. However, by emphasising his sense of "fitting in and inclusivity", Michael may ultimately be reinforcing gender hierarchies and social positioning, where Black men who align with dominant cultural norms are more readily accepted.

Marginalisation in Professional Training

In the extract provided below, Carla offers her rationale for pursuing a career as a counselling psychologist, echoing the sentiments of the other participants who shared a similar desire to explore themselves and others. Conversely, Michael's motivation stemmed from a desire for a career aligned with his identity: "I wanted a career that reflected who he was".

Carla's discourse delicately conveyed a sense of estrangement as she reflected on her feelings:

> So, I started with clinical psychology and errm, but I always felt somewhat out of place, umm, on the course. (pp. 2627)

This portrayal establishes psychology as an exclusive discipline, characterised by shared connection among its practitioners. While not explicitly stated, Carla's reference to her identity as a [West African] woman implies that factors beyond race may have contributed to her sense of exclusion. This suggests an exclusionary nature in clinical psychology, highlighting the power dynamic that marginalises individuals based on race and other differences. This positions Carla as an outsider and illustrates how dominant discourses in psychology perpetuate exclusion, particularly for those who diverge from the majority profile or possess multiple intersecting identities.

This depiction of disconnection and isolation challenges conventional notions of human interconnectedness, offering insight into Carla's interpretation of the self and her perception of social norms.

The notion of difference being related to treatment in the counselling psychology programme is reflected in Nicola's comment when asked about her training experiences. Her communication suggests that this is something that is not necessarily comfortably expressed.

> Or maybe not counselling psychologists, or, um … they were … a certain … how do I describe it? Well, my experience, a certain … maybe middle-class, this is my experience, I'm just showing you my experience, then you'll know my experience. They were middleclass, they were not, um, what's it called, funding wasn't an issue in terms of getting their, um, what's it called, hard graft. (p.19)

The characterisation of difference is expressed here through social class. Here, Nicola reflects on the socio-economic dimensions and the unrestricted access to resources that influence PI formation. This discourse into being "different" is deepened by considering the intersectionality of identity, where various forms of marginalisation overlap.

This insight into being "different" is expressed further by Mary's interview. Here, she illustrates this intersectionality, highlighting how multiple aspects of identity, such as gender, race and socio-economic status, collectively shape one's experiences and access to opportunities

> And so it was all really tough. I felt as though I was kind of stripped of an identity that I had created for myself, a sort of status that I had of myself. (p. 27)

Mary articulates the significant costs of being a trainee Black counselling psychologist in this extract. Her discourse extends into an arena where a dominant discourse is imposed on her, compelling her to surrender parts of her personal story and deny facets of her identity to align with a prevailing belief system that pathologies those who do not conform to its expectations. This positions Mary as needing to relinquish facets of her identity to meet the institutional expectations, demonstrating how disciplinary power regulates behaviour to ensure conformity.

Modification and Negotiation of Identity

Building on exploring the participant's training experiences, this section examines the multifaceted nature of identity. Through their discourses, the participants reveal that identity is not a singular construct but a complex interplay of various factors. This section delves into how these layers intersect and shape their professional journey as a Black counselling psychologist, highlighting the role of systemic structures and the nuanced strategies they employ to manage and negotiate their identities in this broader context.

The Subtle Nature of Workplace Racism

Here, Mavis is asked about her experience of skin colour in the work environment. She begins by recalling her upbringing and her relationship with the social issues around race, before moving on to a comparison between the discrimination she faced at work compared to when she visited areas outside of London.

> Um … so … but in the workplace, it's, it's more, er, it's going to be more, um, insidious than that. It's going to be more low-key, more you know. (p. 56).

In this quote, Mavis constructs the behaviours that emerge in professional relationships around race as being related to the perception others hold regarding race. She presents these issues as subtle, often unintentional and sometimes difficult to articulate. By recounting these experiences as occurring in the workplace, Mavis constructs this issue as entrenched in the work environment rather than isolated incidents. The phrase 'you know' at the end of her statements suggests that she feels this experience is mutually shared between herself, the interviewer and possibly other Black counselling psychologists.

Racial identity is constructed by Mavis as an obstacle in her professional relationships and career. This positioning constrains her ability to develop an

integrated racial and PI, as her PI is shaped not only by her role as a counselling psychologist but also by the colour of her skin. The discourse connects with broader patterns of systemic racism in professional contexts, where racism is reproduced not only through overt exclusion but also through subtle, everyday interactions that remain difficult to articulate. By framing these experiences as shared and embedded in the workplace, Mavis highlights how racial identity can silently constrain professional identity, shaping what is possible for her to express or integrate.

The Intersection of Identities

Mary, responding to a question concerning her identity, perceives her racial identity as just one facet of her overall identity, which varies in significance depending on context and perception. Mary views identity as multifaceted and fluid, acknowledging that its meaning can vary significantly based on external perception.

> But, but it's all really important and I think being … I don't know. I mean, now it's making me think about, so I spoke, you know, at the beginning of the interview about the clinical/counselling psychology debate. If I were a Black clinical psychologist, would that be different? Because it's almost like, you know, counselling psychologists, we're already the kind of poor cousins, you know, in the psychology world and then … and then I'm Black and I'm female as well. So, it's like and you kind of think of it in all these layers. (p.35)

Here, Mary perceives her racial identity as one component among many that shape her overall identity, highlighting its contextual variability and the influence of external perceptions on its significance. Instead of merely exploring her identity, she frames it in a context inviting broader connections.

The object that Mary constructs is nuanced and interconnected, suggesting a complex web of social dynamics that significantly shape her identity. As a counselling psychologist, she navigates not only her professional role but must also consider the additional layers of gender and racial identity, which further shape her experiences and her PI both in and outside the profession.

Carla introduces another layer to the complexity of identity by delving into cultural perceptions.

> I think that I can only speak as a Black [West African] woman, but I think that we can be quite, passionate and errr, caught up, in our feelings, you know. In terms of how we express things, so, in my home, my family home, we can express things with emotions and to us, well, it's because I'm passionate about this, this is how I feel and

there's a perception that another person can receive it. Because it's being open, you're being honest, you know, you're being straight to the point, I get it, you know, and they can tolerate that. But some groups may not be able to tolerate that, because it may project, I guess, the sense of aggressiveness or the fact that, umm, yeah … it's usually being aggressive, associated with aggressiveness. But I guess in the family cultural context, it's not perceived in that way. (p. 23)

Her statement, "I can only speak as a Black [West African woman,"] introduces an additional layer to the discourse on identity. While the expression of emotions is a shared reaction among a group of Black people, it is not something that all Black people share. Here, Carla compares the different cultures in the Black community, which she perhaps feels is overlooked. This introspective approach also highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by Black counselling psychologists, where managing cultural norms and societal perceptions becomes integral to PI. Carla addresses the broader implications of managing emotions, particularly in a professional setting where differing cultural norms may lead to misinterpretations. Her acknowledgement of societal perceptions, such as the stereotype that Black women are usually seen as aggressive, underscores the challenges that Black women face in navigating these stereotypes. Carla's recognition of learning to adapt to societal norms while preserving cultural authenticity reveals the dual burden she carries, balancing personal expression and social expectations.

Her acknowledgement of the necessity to separate herself from her emotions implies a significant personal sacrifice and heightened internal and external responsibility. This stance has clear implications, as she reflects: when you're in that setting … yeah [Laugh] … because you quickly learn, that's not going to be tolerated [Laugh]. (p. 23)

Carla highlights the imperative for Black counselling psychologists to remain vigilant about what behaviours are acceptable, what may perpetuate societal stereotypes imposed on them and what is not acceptable.

The Role of Institutions in Perpetuating Racism

In her extract below, Debbie discusses this sense of the Black counselling psychologist being outside of mainstream psychology. In this quote, Debbie discusses the broader implications of race as a social construct in institutional settings.

> I think that sometimes … because Black is, is a construct that is
> treated as different and you're treated as less, that automatically,
> there are institutions that then treat you that way and sometimes, if,
> sometimes, we allow ourselves to be treated that way because we
> don't have a voice. Um, but I'm, I'm lucky that I'm not in that position.
> (p. 19)

In this account, Debbie compares the concerns of race and being Black as a "construct that is treated as different" in institutions where race and Blackness are seen as less than and therefore treated differently. This notion of institutional treatment relates to something far more significant than the individual, speaking to the historical relationship of race and colonisation.

Debbie also recognises her unique position ("I'm not in that position"), yet her mention of 'we allow ourselves' suggests that she once felt voiceless. This could be why she proposes that individuals have a part to play in their treatment. Here, Debbie positions two camps: the individual who is powerless and allows themselves to be treated differently and the individual (of which she is one) who has some degree of power and say in how they are treated.

To achieve this, individuals must learn to negotiate their experiences and interactions to generate different outcomes. For Black counselling psychologists, professional identity is therefore shaped not only by clinical expertise but by the additional labour of challenging how they are perceived within dominant systems. In this framing, responsibility for change becomes unevenly distrusted: Black professionals are expected to adapt and resist, while the dominant group remains largely insulated from scrutiny.

Experiences of Self-Doubt and Blame

Nicola's quote below offers her perspective on the pervasive issues of self-doubt and blame, particularly among Black counselling psychologists.

> That it was okay, because sometimes, you know, and that's
> something where personally and sometimes the system does that,
> is it me? did I do it wrong? No! We go into that critical thinking about
> … no, it's not, excuse me, no.
>
> Interviewer: Mhm.
>
> Nicola: It's not me.
>
> Interviewer: Mhm.
>
> Nicola: Like that doubt.

> Interviewer: Is it almost like there's a, there's a, there's a right and a wrong way, if that makes sense?
>
> Nicola: That's a right, right, yes.
>
> Interviewer: And you think, well actually, it's just a way.
>
> Nicola: It's just a way.
>
> Interviewer: And you're trying to understand it. There's no right or wrong.
>
> Nicola: Understand it and navigate it. But … you know, even so many people of my counterparts who identify as either Black British or Black African, um, we always tend to go "is it me?" Did I do something wrong? On the automatic back foot.
>
> Whereas actually, sometimes, other people do not and there's something … we have to question that, we have to question, what is it about, is it the challenges, is it the pressures, is it … is it what's put on us, is it … are we, what are we facing that is, is, is, is posing that? (p. 24).

Nicola's discourse constructs a collective Black community that she is part of, as indicated by her use of the words "we, my counterparts". The object she presents is that Black counselling psychologists face similar struggles of self-doubt and blame due to discrimination.

She implies that Black counselling psychologists confront a maze of systematic discrimination, which is an experience not shared by all counselling psychologists. In this, Black counselling psychologists are situated as a unique group outside of mainstream counselling psychology, suggesting that their positionality in professional relationships is unequal.

Nicola's assertion that "we have to question" positions herself and other Black counselling psychologists as active agents in recognising, avoiding and rejecting socially held views of race and possibly gender. This action allows Nicola and others to reclaim power in an environment where they might be perceived as inferior due to the colour of their skin.

Nicola's discourse challenges a structure that fails to acknowledge its complicity in the marginalisation of Black counselling psychologists and other minority groups. This failure undermines their credibility and exacerbates the sense of alienation and disenfranchisement felt by Black counselling psychologists.

Coping Mechanisms

Belinda discusses how she handles situations where race appears to be a questioning factor in her professional relationships.

> Belinda: Oh, the, with those sorts of situations, it's more to do with, um … how will I put it? That's where you embrace two cultures and you look at the bigger picture and I think I have a spiritual side to me.
>
> Interviewer: Mhm.
>
> Belinda: Which is there's a bigger picture and now in hindsight, I am so happy I didn't get it, because he's sweating like a roasted chicken and if I had [laughs] and if I had got it, they would have made my life miserable, because I would have had to work under them.
>
> Interviewer: When you say, um, embrace two cultures …
>
> Belinda: The spiritual side. (p. 13)

Her contemplation over how to deliver this information ("um … how will I put it?") suggests a need to engage in a particular type of language. This implies both an insight into what can be said and a level of sophistication in how to discuss this. Her language choice appears intentional, as does her reference to herself as having a spiritual side. It invokes a specific understanding of what Belinda feels is necessary for a "richer life".

Belinda's laughter denotes uneasiness, but accepting her spiritual side somehow allows her to accept her experiences. It is as though she wears her spirituality as if it were a coat of armour. Her discourse constructs a narrative where spirituality provides a protective layer, enabling her to navigate and endure the racialised challenges in her professional environment. By framing her response through spirituality, Belinda positions herself as someone who can transcend immediate prejudices, suggesting an internal resilience that fortifies her identity.

This narrative places Belinda in a unique position, allowing her to cope with and reinterpret potentially discriminatory experiences through a spiritual lens. Her use of the term ("embrace two cultures") highlights her ability to navigate and reconcile her professional and personal identities despite the racial biases she encounters. This construction suggests that for Belinda and perhaps other Black counselling psychologists, spirituality can be a vital resource for maintaining professional and personal integrity in the face of systemic challenges.

The Professional Landscape of Counselling Psychology

In this section, the formation of a PI is scrutinised through the lens of the broader political tensions between counselling psychology and clinical psychology. These interdisciplinary tensions often necessitate that counselling psychologists achieve additional qualifications and experience post-registration to secure positions typically held by clinical psychologists. This section examines how the perception of counselling psychology in the hierarchy of psychological professions and the broader societal context affects this dynamic.

For Black counselling psychologists, this situation is further compounded by racial disadvantages, creating a double burden.

Navigating Professional Identity and Social Acceptance

Mary's response discusses forming a PI for counselling psychologists amidst the broader political tensions between clinical and counselling psychology. This discourse examines counselling psychology's effort to fit in and be seen as equal to clinical psychologists and highlights the compounded challenges.

> So, there's all of this stuff so that we fit in and we can fit in, we're seen as equal to clinical psychologists … but somehow, we want to be seen as distinct, and we haven't really worked out how to be, to do both. To be kind of just seen as equal, the same, but different. (p. 9).

In this extract, Mary reflects on counselling psychology's efforts to "fit in" to be seen as "equal to clinical psychology". Her repetitive use of the word "we" constructs a narrative that intertwines her personal insights with the broader professional struggle for recognition. The emphasis on "we" suggests a deeply personal connection to this challenge, as if Mary is confronting a dual reality: she must assert equality while preserving her unique identity. This double consciousness underscores the complexity of identity formation.

By explicitly stating "seen as equal, but different", Mary positions herself as someone with personal insight into this challenging reality, yet also as an outsider, potentially due to her identity as a Black woman. This dual positioning indicates Mary's awareness of the uncomfortable truths inherent in striving for equality while maintaining distinctiveness.

Mary's articulation of the challenges faced in balancing acceptance in the established hierarchy of psychology while preserving a separate identity highlights the inherent difficulties of navigating identity integration in such spaces.

Her discourse illustrates the intricate dynamics of PI, revealing how institutional frameworks shape perspectives while individuals strive to maintain their distinctiveness. This reflects the profound tension between belonging and differentiation that many professionals may experience in hierarchical and exclusionary systems, evoking a sense of struggle and conflict.

Experiences in Building a Professional Identity

The following passage is Mary's response to being asked about her experiences developing her PI since qualifying as a counselling psychologist. She states how tough it was to find work due to a lack of experience and the programme's strict requirements and financial commitments. She recalls an experience where she was called back for a second interview, only to be told that she did not have enough experience. This highlights the need for counselling psychologists to demonstrate qualities beyond their professional qualifications to gain recognition and credibility.

> … and that's been a real fight, because doing the training, I wasn't, I did have the experience of working with children in school, the placement, a school-based placement, but I didn't get a CAMHS placement and I couldn't get one, um, because … I couldn't afford the time to get one, because it wasn't going to count … So, it meant that once I qualified, it was really difficult to get a job and I'd have interviews and it … I remember even getting called back for a second interview … and then being told, 'Oh, you didn't get it because you don't have CAMHS experience.' (pp. 28-29).

By stating that she could not gain the experience she needed during training, Mary constructs herself under the authority of a restricted discipline. The regulating body imposes its will over its students, taught by experts in that body and led by its governing authority. Her statement, "Once qualified, it was really difficult to get a job," reflects someone who felt unable to be an autonomous agent in her choices and, consequently, in her identity. This implies that her PI alone was insufficient, and more was needed to be accepted outside counselling psychology.

In her discourse, Mary positions herself as having relatively little power. Her reference to a "point system" constructs a framework that is both excluding and exclusive, where discourses shape subjectivities and create social barriers to inclusivity through systemic power. Nevertheless, the ideology is not received as an oppressive state but rather one that is contested, as she becomes an active subject in this position, as seen when she expands on why she did not get this post.

Mary refers to a "points system", a system that she felt she would "never get" unless she "fought" to get the credibility that this point system would afford her role as a counselling psychologist.

> So, when I had my first job post-qualification, I worked really hard there to make sure that I was then sort of promoted to the lead professional sort of like because I was like I need to have a little bit of clout, I need to have something that I'm bringing with me to these interviews for CAMHS jobs so that I can get ahead. (p. 29)

In her account, Mary details her responsibilities to move up the "points system," including being a "lead professional," "having a bit more clout" and something that makes her stand apart from other candidates. By emphasising the importance of having qualities beyond those associated with her professional accomplishments, Mary positions herself and the PI of counselling psychologists as needing to accomplish more than just their professional qualifications to prove their credibility and worth. In Mary's discourse, she displays what is necessary to get ahead. She implicitly demonstrates the connection between knowledge and power, highlighting how systemic discourses shape and define what is valued and what is not.

Comparing Training and Integration: Counselling Psychology vs. Clinical Psychology

Here, Mary is considering counselling psychology and clinical psychology training. Her account turns to the relationship between clinical psychology and the National Health Service (NHS). Her narrative emphasises the systemic support clinical psychologists receive from the NHS and counselling psychology's efforts to be seen as equal yet distinct.

> Interviewer: Why do you think that is?
>
> I mean, I suppose historically, if you kind of think about the way that clinical psychology training is set up, it's part of, you're part of the NHS. From the moment that you start your training, you're, you're … funded, training funded by the NHS. You're employed as a trainee, even the wage. Placements are, you know, there's the link between the different settings, different trusts … and universities to be able to offer a certain number of placements and those placements are for clinical psychologists. So they kind of have this, this place in the NHS that is just, just is. You know, that's … where you belong (p. 7).

Mary's accounts of clinical psychology capture the intricate relationship between clinical psychology and large institutions like the NHS. Her discourse constructs clinical psychology as part of a system where the structural system of

the NHS shapes their identity and training. This highlights institutions' influential role in shaping PI and social positioning in society. Similarly, her discourse suggests a level of acceptance of this arrangement and the role of institutional structures in shaping professional identities.

Recognition Challenges in the NHS

In the extract below, we see first-hand the experiences of working in the NHS and the burden that counselling psychologists carry because they must explain their role and PI as counselling psychologists. It highlights the responsibility of counselling psychologists to educate others about their profession and the difficulties of fitting into institutional norms.

> When I started off err and having to arrive here, I had to try to explain to myself what I was doing. I mean, I know who I am and what I'm doing, but then having to fit into here was a bit, a bit of a struggle, I think … I got in because the placement I had ... And they knew me and they knew the kind of work that I was capable of doing. Errm, because we do good work and they, you know, because I was a bit anxious about how I was going to get in, because most of the jobs were advertised for clinical psychologists at that time. (p. 5) In this passage, Michael navigates the complexities of explaining his role as a counselling psychologist. The audience, his colleagues, do not share his knowledge about counselling psychology; therefore, in this extract, Michael assumes the role of an educator, highlighting the nuanced understanding required to comprehend the position of counselling psychology.

Despite counselling psychology's attained status, Michael's discourse suggests a gap in understanding outside the profession, placing the responsibility on counselling psychologists to enlighten others. His assertion of knowing 'who he is' as a counselling psychologist implies a varied understanding among counselling psychologists and an exclusive dynamic in their PI. This exclusivity may pose challenges for counselling psychologists whose identities diverge from institutional norms, fostering a potentially contested professional landscape.

As an educator, this positions Michael as a facilitator in the process of change between his identity as a counselling psychologist and the roles he is expected to play. However, his position is constructed as not inclusive of all counselling psychologists. His use of the phrase, 'I know who I am and what I'm doing', would suggest that not all counselling psychologists share the same understanding of their PI and work. Hence, his position is exclusive and may present a dynamic and possibly contested PI. Therefore, it may be easier for other counselling psychologists to conform to the roles prescribed to them in

institutions where their identity does not fit the ideologies and competing conceptions of PI.

Michael's position may also constrain him as the consequences of his actions fall not just on him but on all counselling psychologists because, as counselling psychologists, 'we do good work' and not doing good work will reflect poorly on him and the profession. Still, in this discourse, Michael can be seen to be the author of his own story, and in that, he can be seen as undertaking the role of an active participant in the change towards how his identity is valued and seen in society.

Solidarity and Professional Identity in Counselling Psychology

In this passage, Mary recalls meeting other counselling psychologists, the importance of working with counselling psychologists and how group membership reinforces PI. Her narrative explores the internal and external challenges counselling psychologists face and the need for solidarity in navigating the complex landscape of PI and societal expectations.

> It's like, well, we're COPs and I remember like someone new starting and they'd bring them round and like 'This is so and so and they're the counselling psychologist', and I would be like ah. [laughs]. So yeah, and I think that is quite an important part of my identity, is kind of working alongside other counselling psychologists. (pp. 245-250)

Here, we see a reference to group membership or belongingness. By referring to counselling psychologists as "COPs," she constructs something that is possibly political and complex. It suggests that counselling psychologists are members of a distinctive group. Although they are not members of mainstream policing (COPs), counselling psychologists must still safeguard and defend their PI.

In Mary's quote, there appears to be both an internal (their PI) and external object (society) that counselling psychologists are up against. Their identity and reality are complex and require solidarity that comes from working alongside other counselling psychologists. Here, Mary positions the PI of counselling psychologists as being faced with a huge obligation, which entails understanding a system, campaigning for inclusion, ranking and educating. The responsibility of a counselling psychologist is seemingly constructed here by Mary, the counselling psychologist, as "COPs" of both the profession and the environments in which they work.

Counselling Psychology's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Here, Michael considers counselling psychology's approach to diversity and the inclusive nature of the profession. He discusses how the profession's understanding of the individual creates opportunities for minorities, reflecting on his own experiences and the biases embedded in the world of psychology.

> I think because counselling psychology … now you're making me think about it in terms of the way that it thinks and the kind of approach that it takes, its more … and the diversity of it, the inclusiveness of it um and the way that it thinks phenomenologically I think that um maybe at the time that, that was the door through in which I was able to … and then look, looking now at it in terms of the amount of people that ... it, it is providing that kind of opportunity, I think for a lot of Black and ethnic, ethnic minorities to come through, I think, because um not that we're not good enough to do clinical because, because we can do that um and do it very well too. But I think that, um, I think the biases are there because the biases are embedded in the system. Because I argued with that um, erm, with my students … I said. (p. 18)

Here, Michael describes counselling psychology as something different, even separate, from other disciplines in psychology in that it looks at people as individuals and their experiences as unique. He builds on what counselling psychology is and its holistic approach to the subject and, in turn, constructs the identity of counselling psychologists. His linguistic term 'phenomenologically' is suggestive of something personal. It is possible that his account of counselling psychology 'providing opportunity for Black and ethnic minorities' is a reflective account of his own experience as a minority. His discourse is also interesting in that, earlier in the intersection of social identities discourse, Michael's experiences of racism appeared to be in contrast to the other participants – 'that wasn't an anxiety for me'. However, now he acknowledges the biases in the system, which appears to imply that experiences can be conflicting. This highlights that not all Black and minority people have the same experiences.

The Identity of the Black Counselling Psychologist

In the extract below, Belinda responds to being asked about how her experiences affected her identity as a counselling psychologist. The discourses presented below highlight the challenges of being a minority in the profession, the sense of exclusion in institutions like the NHS and the impact of racial identity on their PI.

> Belinda: Oh yeah, they're different because I've worked in different places. Because it, especially the … I think it's the work environment that made it very clear, because I've always worked in, er …

environments where I'm only the Black counselling psychologist. So, it's glaring, it's there.

Interviewer: What's clear?

Belinda: That I'm the only … I was working in, um, (deleted) one of the (deleted) and um, I got it every day, because the patients would say, 'That Black psych. [laughs] 'Where's the Black psych?' [laughs] So. (pp. 56-57)

Here, Belinda constructs a PI encompassing her racial identity: "the only Black counselling psychologist". This phrase is personal and divorces Belinda's experiences from other counselling psychologists who do not identify as Black. It gives the impression that being a Black counselling psychologist is a rare phenomenon that was "made very clear" to Belinda in her professional experiences. In this quote, Belinda constructs something obvious for her and stands centre stage for each professional encounter. These encounters do not only involve her professional counterparts but also her clients.

When Belinda talks about the idea of "it's glaring, it's there," she builds a construct where difference is evident to her and variation in culture is little or none; this means blending into a culture that is not always reflective of herself – "the Black psych".

Belinda's reaction, laughter and placidity instilled a certain ease that came with it, a hidden composure, suggesting that this interaction was not an isolated event. These experiences appear to have developed a certain learned response in her. In this context, her workspace can be seen as a stage where she strategically presents herself and her communication as a performance that must be seen as professional. This professionalism channelled through her PI allows remarks about her skin colour to be washed away.

Belinda's actions can be seen to illustrate a reclaiming of power, a determined response to a biased society that challenges the identity of the Black counselling psychologists. If knowledge is then power, in this position, Belinda positions herself as more powerful, as she constructs a stage whereas the main character, she controls the performance and its audience by determining what infiltrates her existence.

Nicola responds to a similar question about her experiences. Her dialogue swiftly moves from her experiences as a counselling psychologist in the NHS and working alongside other Black counselling psychologists to their decision to find careers outside the NHS.

> You'll see them either in private. You might see them as counselling
> psychologists in The Priory. But not in the NHS … There'll be none.
> Yeah, yeah, yeah. So that's the decisions people are making. (p. 88).

The language used in this statement by Nicola – "you'll never see them in the NHS" – is highly provocative and expressive of a possible problematised issue that Black counselling psychologists have in the NHS. Her statement evokes a sense of exclusion and marginalisation experienced by Black counselling psychologists in this institution. Nicola's response offers insight into the experiences of Black counselling psychologists, particularly regarding their career trajectory. Her statement gives the impression that Black counselling psychologists who have chosen employment in the NHS are a rare phenomenon to see.

Here, Nicola constructs a picture where there is an obscure relationship between Black counselling psychologists and the NHS; she constructs a type of cost to the Black counselling psychologist when working in the NHS. Still, what is not apparent in this statement is the origin of why the Black counselling psychologists are so rare in this environment and what the cost might be to them. Still, her statement gives the impression that the decision not to work in the NHS is conscious, though one wonders whether this decision is exclusively theirs. However, Nicola's discourse can be seen as discursively constructing the NHS as an institution of exclusion and marginalisation for Black counselling psychologists. By positioning the NHS as a space where Black counselling psychologists are conspicuously absent, Nicola sheds light on the systemic barriers that contribute to their underrepresentation in the NHS.

This sense of the Black counselling psychologist being absent in mainstream institutions is also found in the excerpt from Carla's transcript below.

> I'm saddened, on some level, that people say that to me. Because I'm
> in London, I'm in London, I just think that [laughs], where are all the
> Black psychologists? Or minority, Black minority, ethnic psychologists.
> (p. 15)

Here, Carla is concerned about the reality of Black counselling psychologists in London and their absence in the profession. Working in the NHS gives Carla first-hand experience of being part of an elite group of minorities. However, her statement portrays a worrying awareness of the underrepresentation of a group of individuals she relates to and a disturbing realisation that this is occurring. Carla's reference to London gives the impression that she strongly believed London would hold something different for

the Black counselling psychologist. This positions Carla in a somewhat isolated role, as someone who may be regarded as an outsider. At the same time, it reflects her recognition of the importance of her role in this space and her commitment to advocating for change from within. However, it also highlights the complexities of PI construction and the potential compromises that Black counselling psychologists may need to make to navigate institutional power dynamics.

Later, to the same question, Belinda gives an account of her experience as one of the few Black counselling psychologists in the NHS. She starts by explaining her 'foundation', her upbringing and being one of three Black students in a predominantly White school. For Belinda, these early experiences informed much of who she is and how she now relates to people in these White dominated environments.

> Belinda: So, I was already … I had that foundation of being the only Black person in … a White-dominated environment, which, on coming here, has been quite the same thing in my work life. So probably …
> Interviewer: So, it's something that's quite familiar to you?
>
> Belinda: So, I was prepared, really. That's why I said the spiritual side of me, I was prepared even from that. (p. 57).

The statement "I was prepared for it" constructs a tangible and real reality for Belinda. It constructs a reality that has been very much a part of Belinda's world since her early educational experiences in what she calls the 'White dominated environments', and it also highlights the systemic inequalities. It would seem then that these early experiences have given Belinda a gathering of information processes around the perception she holds about the self and the perceptions others hold of her. Her choice to use the description "spiritual side of me" is interesting; it implies something that exists outside the realism of reality but is also part of Belinda and thus influential in how she steers these experiences, suggestive of an existence that governs Belinda's truth.

Here, Belinda's discourse positions her as a product of and a participant in the discourse on race. Her self-perception as someone who is prepared for White-dominated environments reflects a form of self-positioning to broader societal power dynamics, illustrating identity negotiation.

Selfhood

All participants drew on the construction of the activist discourse during their interviews. This discourse creates a world where Black counselling psychologists construct a PI through reflection on selfhood and combating injustices. How Black counselling psychologists perceive themselves, their position, and the people they encounter is instrumental in this section.

Self-Reflection

The following passage shows Belinda's response to being asked her reasons for wanting to become a counselling psychologist. Her response starts vaguely before it moves towards something that appears more personal. This implies that the journey was as introspective as it was about understanding others.

> Belinda: I never really understood human beings. I thought maybe if I did [laughs] psychology … [laughs] I could understand the humanoids.
>
> Interviewer: Okay.
>
> Belinda: There was always something in me that wanted to understand people much
>
> better, so.
>
> Interviewer: And was there something maybe about wanting to understand yourself as well?
>
> Belinda: Yeah, because … I think it's the same thing because I grew up here, went back to my country, so I... (p. 2).

Here, Belinda describes her motivation to learn about human development and become a counselling psychologist. Her discourse suggests that while she wanted to understand people, she also had a desire to understand her own identity and sense of belonging. Belinda constructs the identity of the counselling psychologist as intricate and entwined with personal identity. By stating that understanding herself was the same as understanding "humanoids," Belinda positions the counselling psychologist as someone with insight into the complexity of human beings and their identities. Using the term 'humanoids' suggests a view of humans as structured entities that can be studied and organised by skilled individuals, thus positioning herself as an expert.

This expert position includes understanding the self in the broader socially held construction of knowledge and power. This construction reflects her

perception of her role as involving significant self-awareness and self-regulation, aligning with a professional discourse that values introspection and continuous self-development. Belinda constructs a technology of self that holds the counselling psychologist accountable for developing and maintaining their self-awareness.

She cautiously constructs the complexities of PI, its socio-political context and the person in the profession. For her, these facets of the individual are all intertwined, making any attempt at understanding one without the other futile. Belinda highlights the intertwined nature of personal and professional identities by engaging with a discourse of expertise and self-knowledge. This discourse mobilises the notion that individuals actively shape and are shaped by the power dynamics and discourses they engage with, perpetually navigating and negotiating their identities in these frameworks.

The idea of PI being positioned as the expert in relationships is also reflected in Michael's comment below when asked about his motivation to become a counselling psychologist.

> … a clinician, if that makes sense. Umm, so, the way that they trained us to have a very good understanding of how to be with the client, be with the client meaning being able to have err, a relationship, being able to know how relationships adapt and change. (pp. 1-2)

Michael's reference to "relationships" is central to his quote. Immediately, his discourse appears more in favour of Belinda and her personal construction, but his use of language suggests something more formal. This situates Michael in a well-established therapeutic framework and a widely shared commitment on the part of psychologists. By drawing on this therapeutic discourse, it lends weight to his opinion and, in doing so, aligns him as an expert. This therapeutic discourse and expertise position Michael as occupying a position of power. Although this power could potentially aid his understanding of relationships, it can also cause harm in the therapeutic relationship.

This discourse puts the counselling psychologist in a very niche position. Their training grants them access to a pool of knowledge that enhances their ability to understand and engage with their clients. It also imparts a sense of power where their knowledge confers authority and influence over others. Consequently, this discourse shapes professional identities and creates power structures that enable and constrain the counselling psychologist in their work.

The extract below shows an extension of the motivation to become a counselling psychologist. Here, Debbie deliberates her concerns about the establishments in which counselling psychologists find themselves. Her extract began with a historical underpinning of why she came into the profession before swiftly moving into why she chose to continue her career in private practice instead of the NHS.

> For sure. I think … mm. I think a lot of the way, the way that I practice reflects who I am, I would say. I'm very … [laughs] I think I'm very open. (p. 23)

Consequently, Debbie constructs the object as something that is unreflective of her identity. Her quote implies that there is a matter of personal choice. "[T]he way I practice reflects who I am" suggests that Debbie is choosing whether or not to engage in the bureaucracy of the NHS, implying it is a tangible concern for her. This raises the possibility that not all counselling psychologists feel the same way. Her repetitive use of "I think, I practice, I am, I'm very open" suggests that this perspective is not universally shared, indicating that not all counselling psychologists will resonate with her views or understand her position. The discourse constructs the counselling psychologist's identity as fractured, making available two subject positions — one aligned with alternative thinking and the other with orthodoxy — which in turn delimit how professional identity can be enacted.

Debbie's alternative way of thinking aligns with someone advocating for change. This advocacy discourse highlights a particular issue, positioning Debbie as having insight into what potentially divides counselling psychologists. It also underscores the notion that the construction of a PI is not uniform across the profession.

By explicitly choosing to work privately, Debbie not only constructs herself as unique but also as an outsider. This suggests that the relationship between practitioners like Debbie and their more traditional counterparts is more complex than it might initially appear, presenting a challenge to the field's current understanding of PI and its implications for practice.

Self-Development and the Activist

Here, Nicola is asked about the relationships she feels have shaped the construction of her professional identity. She begins by talking about the people she feels were "helpful" in developing her PI and her time away from the profession.

> So, it's almost … because I needed that. So, it's almost something about how it's not a, it doesn't stop. You can always go back and pick up where you left off, pick up where you left off. Um, so all these, yeah, I think that's important. Because actually, um … going back to shaping me as a counselling psychologist, you always, it's always, you're always growing. (pp. 1344-1349)

Here, Nicola constructs a complex journey, positioning the PI of the counselling psychologists as having a significant level of autonomy in their choices: "You can always go back and pick up where you left". She implies that external and internal factors greatly influence decisions, and it is through these experiences that a professional identity is cultivated. This positions Nicola as someone who is self-governed yet vulnerable to her experiences. Her repeated use of the word "you" suggests that time away from the profession is not an isolated incident for her or her other counterparts. Hinting at a potentially more prominent issue, though her discourse remains vague about the specifics.

By stating that 'you're always growing', Nicola emphasises the continuous nature of personal and professional development, deliberately considering the effects of any potential decision on the self. Each interaction for Nicola is a social arrangement that impacts her identity. Therefore, her journey as a Black counselling psychologist may involve a period of absences:

> it doesn't stop. You can always go back'. This reflects the formation of subjectivities, where a network of social practices continuously shapes identity. Here, Nicola's narrative highlights the constant negotiation of her PI in these dynamics, suggesting that her identity is not static but is in perpetual formation, influenced by her interactions and decisions in professional and personal relationships.

Next, Debbie sheds light on her relationships by expressing what she feels is a necessary characteristic in developing an authentic PI.

> I think I'm true to myself. It's this, this idea of being open. You know, I would like to think, as best as I can, whether I've got friends or whether it's professional … er, how do I say? I'm congruent. (p. 30)

In this extract, Debbie constructs her PI and outlines what she believes is necessary to maintain authenticity. Using herself as an example, she suggests that this 'congruent' position may not be universally accessible to all counselling psychologists. Her assertive language and emphasis imply that such congruence may be particularly challenging for Black counselling psychologists, whose multiple identities may not always be able to coexist harmoniously. This positions Debbie within a discourse of authenticity but also highlights how subject positions made available to Black counselling psychologists can be constrained by

systemic inequalities. By describing herself as "true to herself, open," Debbie actively prescribed identity, illustrating how struggles between authenticity and societal expectations echo Foucault's notion of power relations shaping subjectivities and the resistance of prescribed identities.

Though Michael's language is less personal than his counterpart above, his interview provides a different perspective on his relationships.

> A good understanding of how to be with people, how to work with people and how, how to understand as I said those errr, you know the dynamic processes, you know like, unconscious communications, you know, the, the, issues around, umm, err, cautionary tales, the issues around transference countertransference all those kinds of things. So, and, and, I wanted, I wanted to understand how those things worked and how those things impacted the way therapies are done, and so on. (p. 3)

Michael constructs an object that appears symbolic and mysterious, as if he is recounting a story he had previously kept hidden. It seems a part of him is yearning for greater clarity regarding something elusive yet present. His choice of language suggests that there is much to unravel, indicating that these experiences hold truth and possess an inherent origin. His discourse implies that his message pertains not only to his professional relationships but also to his clinical work. Through these "unconscious communications," Michael must decipher his relationships. For him, the identity of the Black counselling psychologist is shaped by more than conscious awareness; engaging with unconscious processes positions him within a discourse that emphasises the necessity of understanding hidden dynamics in relationships, thereby shaping how he can enact his professional identity.

The need to be aware of processes that might not be consciously available is captured further in Carla's dialogue below when she breaks down her responsibilities to herself and others.

> Interviewer: So, it's reflective practice, reflective learning?
>
> Carla: Yeah. Yeah.
>
> Interviewer: I suppose it gives us the opportunity to reflect on ourselves.
>
> Carla: Absolutely…
>
> Interviewer: And maybe what's important ...
>
> Carla: Yeah, absolutely, but in a safe way. (p. 26)

In this statement, Carla emphasises the individual's responsibility not only to engage in internal self-work but also to recognise its wider significance. This suggests that there is a potential loss if this process is neglected. Her assertion that this must be conducted "in a safe way" indicates that reflective practice involves exposing oneself and that, if undertaken in inappropriate circumstances, it could lead to harm. Here, the counselling psychologist is constructed as having an ethical obligation to their work and a moral responsibility to themselves. Carla positions herself as an advocate, concerned with both her well-being and that of others. Her narrative reflects an engagement with the self that is distinctive and nurturing of a broader cause, advocating for a deeper level of self-awareness while recognising the potential risks involved.

Philanthropic Motivation

Here, Mary is responding to being asked where she positions herself as a Black professional.

> Er, I want, I want to make a difference. I want to be able to make a difference and I want … It's not that I want any sort of prestige or recognition, although that's always good to have that, you know. [laughs] I mean, if they wanted to give me an OBE, I wouldn't say no. [laughs] But I want to be able to make a difference and yeah, people don't necessarily have to say 'Oh, yeah, we went to the, you know, the academy that I set up or anything like that.' It doesn't, it's not about my name in lights. But it's about knowing that I've made an impact on people's lives. (pp. 1151-1161).

Mary's discourse suggests that Black counselling psychologists play a pivotal role in effecting change and possess something that may not be universally accessible: a voice. This places significant responsibility on Black counselling psychologist, as the construction of their PI reflects broader social issues. Her discourse also follows a dominant discourse where responsibility is disproportionately placed on Black professionals, while the dominant group evades responsibility.

Although Mary jests about receiving an OBE, she frames herself and fellow Black counselling psychologists as confronting what appears to be a daunting task. This suggests that the systemic issues in the profession have not been adequately addressed. This social justice discourse is expressed further by Debbie's quote below:

> Sometimes I don't see anything else but that. But that has come from, um … that has come from the experiences I've had with other people where I know that this needs to be done and there isn't any other way. You know, we need to raise the level of awareness. We need to stop,

er, playing lip service. We just need to be straight, and I'm quite
focused on that, and so sometimes, there's certain things that I'm just
that way. (p. 31)

Debbie's reflection on the role of the Black counselling psychologists
implies a stark division between those with voices and the voiceless. Her
assertion, using the words "we, we need to raise the level of awareness,"
suggests a distinct belief about the role of Black counselling psychologists, yet
her caveat, "I'm just that way," suggests everyone might not share her views.

Much like Mary, Debbie emphasises the responsibility of Black
counselling psychologists to avoid aligning themselves with oppressors – "[w]e
need to stop, er, playing lip service" – urging them to transcend mere
compliance. This burden of responsibility extends beyond self-awareness to
encompass a broader social issue that disproportionately impacts the
underrepresented.

In echoing Mary's call for Black counselling psychologists to advocate for
others, Debbie underscores the inherent power vested in her PI. A privilege she
is aware of that is not equally accessible to all Black individuals. Here, the Black
counselling psychologist shoulders a responsibility, not only to protect the self but
also to actively address and challenge the systemic inequalities faced by people
of colour.

The Construction of a Cohesive Identity Discourse

This discourse constructs a world where professional relationships
significantly influence one's PI. These relationships are constructed as both
reflective of the self and as a source of advice and potential benefits.

In the following quote, Michael discusses his experiences meeting
different people and their impact on his journey to becoming a counselling
psychologist.

> There're people I would meet um that would guide you, I guess. Not
> a guide but help you along the way, and I think that's the same in a
> lot of careers. You meet mentors and you kind of meet people that
> guide you or sort-of direct you and I think I'm not any different than
> that. I think as I said before coming along the way, even the people
> at university there were people that would encourage you to do a
> doctorate um but I still wasn't quite sure. But when I was doing the
> placement at err, I was having a good conversation with the
> professor there and she opened up the door and said, 'Why don't
> you go and do this go and do that' and I went for the interview. (p. 16)

In his extract, Michael alludes to the idea of "helpful" encounters. He
presents the information he received as freely available to everyone. However,

his discussions, particularly with the professor considering a doctorate, suggest that these experiences and the knowledge he gained are not easily accessible to all members of society. Michael positions himself as having a certain type of access and knowledge that has allowed him entry into an influential social network that has 'opened up the door' to opportunities. This selective access to knowledge and networks indicates a form of power that is exercised through the control and dissemination of information, as well as the exclusion of others from it. The ambiguity in his discourse regarding how this access was granted leaves space for broader discourses of gender and gatekeeping, where professional opportunities are unequally distributed and systemic barriers are reproduced.

In contrast, Debbie articulates what she considers necessary in her professional relationships and their impact on her PI.

> … they have to. Because you know … the professional
> relationships that you form … … kind of creates, um … it creates an
> extension of you, really, in a professional context and so … [laughs]
> if, if, if people … think you're an arse they don't want to work with
> you. (p. 26).

Debbie's understanding of professional relationships reveals a nuanced understanding of their personal and professional significance. Like Michael, her discourse reflects a sophistication rooted in lived experiences that validate her narrative.

Her portrayal suggests that these relationships are more than mere connections; they actively shape her PI and conduct. For instance, Debbie emphasises that perception in these interactions can profoundly impact one's opportunities and reception ("if people think you're an arse, they don't want to work with you"). This highlights how these relationships operate as sites of power and judgement, influencing her professional persona and actions.

Debbie's assertion that a professional relationship "creates an extension of you" highlights the intimate connection between personal identity and professional relationships. This notion implies a process where external perceptions and expectations mould her self-concept and behaviours, reflecting a form of self-discipline inherent in her professional life. This intricate interplay affords Debbie certain liberties in her professional sphere and exposes her to vulnerabilities, as her actions are scrutinised and evaluated through these relational dynamics.

In this quote, Nicola expands on the extension of the self and underscores the significance of cultural connectedness in shaping her identity.

> … being in tune with where I'm from and, you know, speaking about it and having those frank conversations, those hard conversations, you have to be in tune with who you are and also, you have to have people to tell you about yourself. (p. 47)

Here, Nicola articulates the intrinsic relationship between self-awareness and cultural heritage, underscoring the pivotal role of authentic engagement with one's roots, as highlighted earlier by other participants. This discourse suggests that professional relationships are vehicles for constructing and affirming personal identity narratives.

Her emphasis on "being in tune" – knowing oneself and embracing cultural heritage – reflects an active engagement with her racial and ethnic identity, positioning it as a protective shield against external threats. This stance not only facilitates the authentic navigation of her PI but also her professional relationships and illustrates the dynamic interplay between personal authenticity and PI in a discursive framework. For Nicola, professional relationships are narratives and discourses that interact dynamically to shape identity and provide material for identity performances.

Race in Context

Below, Mary discusses openly her early childhood experience of race and its impact on her early familiar conversations.

> So that was the kind of thing that you're sort of told as you're growing up, this sort of idea that, oh, it's going to be harder for you, you have to work really hard because there's always going to be this sort of established racism and stuff. (Mary p. 31)

Mary constructs race as an omnipresent, complex and diverse construct that perpetually shapes all her experiences. She portrays these inevitable experiences as systemic in mainstream society, influencing specific relationships. The repeated use of "you" points to this construction as universal across all Black individuals, implying a widespread understanding of this 'established racism'.' This positioning suggests that Black counselling psychologists must remain culturally and politically attuned to their environment.

This is echoed in Mavis's extract below when she discusses her experiences of working in a predominantly White environment.

> … um … I mean, it was challenging, but I'm quite, um … um … how can I put it? I'm quite, you know, culturally and politically aware, so I

> expected it, you know and in terms of my, um, family and things like
> that, we've all, I've been raised in quite a, you know, politically aware
> family so we'd always discuss and were always, race, discussing
> race and cultural identity. So, I had people I could talk to about it at
> home. (p. 13)

Mavis acknowledges the challenging realities of her working environment and highlights her own cultural and political awareness ("I mean it was challenging, but I'm quite, um … um … how can I put it? I'm quite, you know, culturally and politically aware"). This self-awareness situates her as possessing knowledge and insight about the world that are not universally shared or experienced. Her family's involvement in discussions about race and cultural identity is portrayed as integral, emphasising the familial support and ideological understanding crucial for navigating such spaces. Like Mary, Mavis underscores the imperative for Black counselling psychologists to remain critically aware of their racial and cultural identities as they navigate societal contexts.

Describing her family as "politically aware," Mavis's upbringing in a household where political awareness was a key value signifies the importance of this knowledge framework in her life. This suggests that Black counselling psychologists must engage in practices akin to technologies of the self, where they adopt strategies to regulate and navigate the systems of power dynamics.

Debbie's illustration below underscores the realities of being Black in a predominantly White environment.

> It's so subtle … You know, it's a, it's a microaggression… and I have
> to go away and think about whether or not I'm just being overly
> sensitive. (p. 35)

Here, Debbie constructs the notion of a refined, pervasive influence, one that necessitates constant self-monitoring and management. Choosing to describe herself as 'overly sensitive' is interesting; with this, she acknowledges both an awareness of her heightened emotional responses and their potential implications. This suggests that Black counselling psychologists must remain vigilant against both external threats (such as overt racism or discrimination) and inadvertent internal threats (like self-doubt or imposter syndrome) to their self-concept, highlighting the continuous negotiation between personal identity and external perceptions.

She also constructs a less articulated external object in her professional relationships. Debbie's use of the term "microaggression" introduces an external reality that, while accurate, feels abstract to some. Her language portrays

experiences as valid and tangible, though not universal. This reflects the discursive construction of racial identity as omnipresent and subtly denied by societal norms.

In this context, the Black counselling psychologist is positioned with some degree of power and agency in their professional relationships, deciding whether or not to engage with the socially constructed notion of race. The Black counselling psychologists who can "own who they are" (Carla, p.29) and understand that "it's going to be harder for you and […] you have to work hard because there's always going to be this sort of institutional racism and stuff" (Mary, p.31) demonstrate a technology of self. However, this comes at a cost and involves learning to manage their relationships or resist the dominant social group's influence, navigating through systemic power dynamics to maintain a cohesive professional and racial identity.

Following Mary's reflections on the pervasive nature of racial challenges, Carla elaborates on her journey in psychology, highlighting the pressures to conform and the eventual acceptance of her identity.

> I would say this, though, for such a long time, being in the world of psychology, I never felt that I could truly be who I want to be, I always felt that, I had to fit in, more so with clinical psychology. And that, meant that I felt I had to look a certain way, so, that I could fit in. I always felt that I had to appear more European and ermm, perhaps hold back on a lot of things that I wanted to say. I no longer feel like that, I no longer feel that I have to try and fit in, into this system, into the very system that didn't accept me and try to reject me, anyway [laughs] but umm, but I feel that now, I've come to that place where, I'm comfortable, with who I am as a Black woman! but also, as a Black psychologist, to the point where I feel that I no longer have to appear European, I no longer have to … yeah, just try to fit in, I could just be me. (p. 24).

This extract begins with an explicit account of psychology's lack of inclusiveness for the Black female psychologist. Carla's construction of psychology as a discipline implies systemic exclusion, pervading its structure and the individuals who operate in it. By stating she 'tried to fit into a system' and felt she needed to "appear more European," Carla underscores the profound and multifaceted challenges she faced, suggesting that this lack of inclusiveness is deeply entrenched in the field.

While her quote conveys a sense of isolation and burden, it also contains an element of liberation. Carla's discourse implies that for Black counselling psychologists, the struggle is not about being sanitised or controlled but rather about achieving a form of personal and societal breakthrough. This breakthrough

is achieved through the construction of an identity that resists conformity and embraces authenticity, positioning Carla as both an empowered individual and a symbol of broader social progress. This dual construction highlights the interplay between personal resilience and systemic barriers, illustrating how Black counselling psychologists may navigate and resist dominant power structures to affirm professional and racial identity.

Nicola sheds light on the journey of the Black counselling psychologist, particularly in terms of personal and professional growth.

> Nicola: I think coming as a, as a counselling psychologist, you, you know, sometimes you have the side eye because people are going into these professions or fellow counselling psychologists, and you think they've got a lot of growth to do.
>
> Interviewer: [Mhm].
>
> Nicola: They've got, you can just tell they're not there yet, some of the things they say or they have the same blocks with clients, even during supervision.
>
> Interviewer: Mhm.
>
> Nicola: You can just tell. We're all in our journey but actually, some of the things, you, in order to empower clients and meet them where they're at, you have to do the work on yourself and I think as a Counselling Psychologist, unless you're willing to go there, that's what we're doing, that's why the grind and the journey and the personal … is about because you're working on yourself. (pp. 4647)

Nicola positions herself with a degree of sovereignty that not every Black counselling psychologist has. This autonomy is constructed as a process, a journey of self-discovery and development. At this juncture, the attuned Black counselling psychologist is responsible for 'doing the work on yourself'. According to Nicola, this work means they must be 'willing to go there' and 'own who you are'. This underscores the importance of critical self-awareness and personal growth and the potential implications for the authenticity of the Black counselling psychologist navigating professional landscapes.

Nicola's discourse divides Black counselling psychologists into two categories: those who are self-aware and those who are not. The latter group, as Nicola suggests, risks entanglement in disciplinary mechanisms that could inadvertently reinforce oppressive power dynamics in their work and professional contexts. This shifts Nicola's discourse from personal introspection to a stance grounded in professional authority, suggesting her potential to initiate

transformative shifts. This discourse alignment resonates with broader healthcare professional consensus on the necessity for critical self-reflection.

Nicola's depiction of the relationship between Black counselling psychologists and the professional landscape illuminates inherent asymmetries. Those less engaged in self-reflective practice may inadvertently perpetuate disciplinary norms that marginalise themselves and their clients.

Conclusion

This chapter has expanded the critical themes derived from the participants' discourses on racial and PI in professional relationships. These themes underscore the inherent tensions between personal identity, professional roles, gender dynamics and interpersonal interactions. The next chapter will delve into each in greater detail, exploring its nuances and implications. This discussion aims to illuminate the significance of these findings and their contribution to the field.

Discussion

Having laid the foundation for our investigation into the construction of racial and professional identities among Black British counselling psychologists, we begin the discussion chapter by examining how these identities intersect with social power dynamics and institutional structures. Central to this analysis are five key discourses surrounding the intersection of racial and professional identities alongside other social identities. This includes exploring how these intersecting identities relate to power dynamics, the modification and negotiation of identities and their implications in the professional landscape of counselling psychology.

Through the participants' narratives, we explore how systemic barriers and institutional practices shape their experiences and professional development, leading to a complex interplay of resilience, marginalisation and identity formation. The discussion will first examine the intersection of identities and power dynamics in training institutes, highlighting how professional identities are understood through self-perception and the perceptions of others, while shedding light on the power imbalances that arise from these intersections.

Next, it will delve into the modification and negotiation of identities, exploring how Black counselling psychologists navigate their identities in predominantly White professional spaces, emphasising both their resilience and the systemic barriers they encounter. Following this, the chapter will turn its

attention to the professional landscape of counselling psychology, addressing the structural and institutional challenges faced by counselling psychologists with particular reference to Black counselling psychologists in the context of institutions like the NHS and its implications for professional recognition and legitimacy.

Subsequently, we will discuss the significance of selfhood and reflection, emphasising how self-reflection and reflexivity empower participants to maintain ethical practice while navigating power imbalances in their professional relationships. Lastly, the discussion will explore how Black counselling psychologists construct a cohesive professional identity by integrating external and internal networks of support, knowledge and cultural connectedness.

Through this framework, the discussion will further analyse the emotional impacts, the quest for cultural authenticity and the critical need for systemic reforms to foster inclusivity and support for Black counselling psychologists.

Key Findings

The Intersection of Social Identities and Power Dynamics

The discourse on professional identity formation in contexts of dominance and oppression highlights the role of self-perception and external perception. This section focuses on the experiences of counselling psychologists with marginalised identities, examining how these identities shape their professional development. It also considers the influence of institutional structures on the identity formation of Black counselling psychologists. Although this research treated race as a singular identity aspect, participants approached identity as multifaceted and interconnected (Paulraj, 2016). Cultural identity, for example, intersects with self-perception and professional roles. The literature indicates a lack of consensus on professional identity formation (Axford & Williams, 2021). However, it suggests that minority professionals' identities are shaped by intersecting social dimensions beyond racial identity (Johnson et al., 2024; Showunmi, 2023). These intersections produce power imbalances that significantly impact professional experiences (Flores et al., 2023). As Kenny and Briner (2007) argue, racial identity plays a critical role in overall identity, influenced by broader social contexts and intersecting identities. Therefore, contextual factors related to race and other intersecting identities are crucial in shaping the development of professional identity and influencing broader understandings of self in professional contexts.

Carla's narrative vividly illustrates this complexity. She describes a clash between her confident and hopeful [West African] identity and the dominant culture of her training institute. Her experiences echo the findings of Adetimole, Afuape and Vara (2005), who discuss the experiences of Black trainees in clinical psychology and how racism affects their training, highlighting the challenges they face in predominantly White institutions. Pieterse et al. (2023) emphasise that the professional identity development of counselling psychologists of colour is shaped by their cultural backgrounds, suggesting that Carla's robust identity may serve as both a source of strength and a point of conflict in her academic environment. Ngadjui and Doughty Horn (2024) explore the professional identity development of Black doctoral students, providing a reflexive model that parallels Carla's experiences as she navigates her identity in a challenging context. In addition, Carter et al. (2018) offer a meta-analytic review of racial discrimination's impact on health and well-being, illustrating the systemic issues that create obstacles for minority students.

Carla's struggle for recognition reflects a broader issue in the UK's higher education structure. Arday, Branchu and Boliver (2021) argue that such experiences stem from Eurocentric frameworks in institutions, which often marginalise the voices and experiences of minority students. They invoke Paulo Freire's concept of the 'banking system of education' to explain how experiences like Carla's demonstrate that a passive approach to learning hinders critical thinking and the expression of diverse identities. This banking system contributes to oppressive dynamics faced by minorities in training institutes, as highlighted by Gillborn et al. (2023), who assert that institutional policies and Eurocentric curricula perpetuate racial disparities and disproportionately exclude students of colour.

The experiences of Black and minority ethnic students become further complicated by institutional racism, as identified by Showunmi (2023). This is evident in Mary's discourse which highlights the costs of being a minority student and illustrates how dominant academic narratives impose oppressive projections onto minority trainees. Her narrative reveals a requirement to surrender aspects of her identity in favour of dominant belief systems that pathologies those who do not appear to meet established expectations, a tendency that Rapmund (2000) argues is well-documented in academic spaces.

These issues are compounded by systemic barriers to access and progression, particularly for Black and minority ethnic postgraduate students in counselling psychology (Daloye, 2022). Scholars such as Watson (2004) and

Hook (2007) argue that this pressure to conform leads to exploitation, as equality of opportunity is often illusory. In such contexts, authenticity is compromised by dominant Eurocentric ideals that dictate what is considered legitimate knowledge or behaviour. This tension invites deeper analysis into how educational institutions produce subjectivities and constrain expressions of identity.

Bourassa (2018) argues that educational institutions operate as sites of biopolitical governance, wherein minority identities are shaped to conform to dominant epistemic frameworks through subtle micropolitical techniques, including surveillance, validation and exclusion. While institutional structures often constrain identity, it is equally important to consider how individuals navigate and contest these limitations in those systems.

Crenshaw (1989) theory of intersectionality enriches this discussion by highlighting how overlapping identities influence one's experiences of oppressive and resistance. This perspective reveals that even within oppressive systems, individuals assert agency to challenge exclusionary practices and affirm their identities. However, despite the emergence of agency, the dominant social narratives surrounding identities continue to shape lived realities.

Language also plays a significant role in maintaining these narratives. The societal construction of the 'other' – particularly minorities – reinforces marginalisation and normalises exclusion, allowing prejudices to persist. Morgan (2008) argues that such language perpetuates deep-seated prejudices, placing an additional burden on those who must navigate systems not designed for them. These burdens are not individualised but emerge from historically embedded narratives about race and difference.

Foucault (1968) emphasises the importance of recognising the historical forces that shape our understanding of the 'other' as fundamentally different. This understanding helps sustain the socio-political and historical structures that produce and reinforce inequality, casting minority identities as inferior within dominant frameworks. Consequently, different groups experience unique forms of oppression rooted in specific historical and cultural contexts.

Despite these systemic challenges, individual agency remains a critical factor Cross (1995) observed that many individuals draw on cultural identity and personal resilience to succeed despite exclusionary structures. Atayero and Dodzo (2021) similarly argue that racism significantly shapes Black students' academic experiences, revealing that their success often depends on navigating institutions that were never designed with their identities in mind.

Building on these systemic issues, Tinsley-Jones (2001) asserts that while psychology has acknowledged the importance of diversity, it has largely neglected to address the pervasive racism embedded in its institutional structures. This oversight has been reinforced by recent global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit and social unrest in the United States and the UK (Bassett, 2021), compounding the challenges faced by minority students and professional psychologists. Williams, Faber and Duniya (2022) support this, arguing that the neglect of racism in psychology has created a significant gap in professionals' understanding of the specific challenges faced by minority individuals, including students. They contend that the field's reliance on White dominant norms and lack of anti-racist training perpetuate this disconnect. This lack of awareness translates into limited research focusing on the unique needs of these students (Daloye, 2022). Consequently, this limited body of research not only obscures the specific needs of minority students but also hinders the development of culturally responsive practices and policies required to support minority psychologists and perpetuates cycles of marginalisation, leaving these individuals without the appropriate resources and support in their academic journeys (Daloye, 2022; Abebe & Harper, 2019). Williams, Faber and Duniya (2022) and Cazer and Creary (2016) highlight the urgency for psychology to actively confront systemic barriers, particularly those rooted in White-dominant cultural frameworks. They advocate for a concerted effort to adopt inclusive practices that genuinely reflect diversity and lived experience, which are essential for validating and empowering minoritised voices in the discipline (Bassett, 2021).

Flores et al. (2023) provide a valuable lens on the experiences of women of colour in counselling psychology doctoral programmes. Their work highlights essential issues, emphasising individual experiences and calling for faculty to decolonise and re-indigenise the curriculum. However, this perspective remains limited, as it does not fully engage with the systemic barriers that continue to restrict minority psychologists' ability to participate and flourish in the profession. In practice, the structural and institutional challenges of decolonising and re-indigenising the profession may render such initiatives unfeasible. Addressing these barriers is therefore essential if counselling psychology is to move beyond tokenistic inclusion (Ayyildiz, 2020).

This sentiment is echoed by Shah et al. (2012), who argue that the challenges faced by minority trainees stem from broader institutional structures rather than isolated individual experiences. McDowell (2008) expands on this by examining the complex and interlocking inequalities that ethnic minorities

encounter, demonstrating how these factors create persistent barriers in both academic and professional settings. In addition, Barnes (2022) shows that structural inequality manifests as workplace racial inequality and marginalisation. Collectively, these findings indicate that the barriers are systemic rather than individual.

Daloye (2022) articulates the urgency of enhancing resources, progression and success for Black and minority ethnic postgraduate students in the UK, arguing that understanding these systemic challenges is vital for creating equitable educational environments. While the literature calls for urgent action to address these issues, it is equally important to acknowledge the progress made in the field. Deblaere et al. (2019) highlight ongoing initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusion in counselling psychology training, suggesting that there is potential for meaningful change. Thus, the need for a multifaceted approach that recognises both systemic challenges and efforts toward progress becomes increasingly critical. Beyond material resources and policy initiatives, it is equally important to examine how identity itself is discursively constructed within academic spaces that reproduce hegemonic values.

The findings reveal how identity is constructed in academic spaces that operate through hegemonic discourses, demonstrating how epistemological power shapes what is considered valid knowledge and legitimate experience. As social beings actively constructing an identity in this space, participants' discourses reflect the political engagement of identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Higginbotham & Anderson, 2006), underscoring how individuals navigate structures of power and inequality in their self-construction. This is evident in how dominant value systems and systemic inequalities become normalised, often producing 'objects' (Foucault, 1980) that, according to Hughey (2010), occupy spaces imbued with constructs of Whiteness. These frameworks reinforce racial, cultural and hierarchical distinctions, perpetuating notions of superiority and exclusion. These discursive regimes shape epistemological boundaries by privileging certain forms of knowledge while silencing others. From a social constructionist standpoint, such boundaries reveal how meaning and legitimacy are co-produced through institutional norms, language and power. Centred on power differentials, these ideologies justify exploitation (Watson, 2004), perpetuating a system where those who do not fit into the dominant narrative are marginalised and oppressed. Alleyne (2004) shows how these dominant academic narratives can lead to workplace oppression for minority students, ultimately inhibiting their professional development and impeding the

development of diverse epistemologies and perspectives in the profession. Yet within these structures, participants also demonstrate acts of resistance – subtle and overt – by strategically shifting discourse, reclaiming identity markers and cultivating alternative spaces of belonging that contest dominant narratives and open pathways for epistemic diversity.

The discourse on identity construction in academia is complex and contested. Scholars such as Sue et al. (2007) and Solórzano et al. (2000) argue that social tools, particularly language, reproduce power arrangements that privilege the dominant culture and perpetuate inequalities. This replicative function results in minority students experiencing pressure to conform to dominant narratives, thereby undermining their sense of identity (Jones et al., 2004). Afuape (2004) emphasises this struggle, explicitly noting the challenges faced by Black female psychologists in authentically expressing themselves in therapeutic settings, illustrating the internal conflict between personal identity and imposed narratives.

This normalisation and internalised racism give rise to a biopolitical apparatus (Ayyildiz, 2020) that governs identities and sustains the wider social and political structures of academia. The reach of these challenges extends beyond educational contexts, reflecting deep-seated structural inequalities across multiple sectors. Fernando (1996) traces the persistent inequalities experienced by Black British individuals to historical oppression, understanding the need to confront these systemic foundations. Thus, as Gillborn et al. (2023) contend, tackling systemic racial inequality requires comprehensive and far-reaching changes in academic institutions and beyond.

It is also important to acknowledge the emotional effect of marginalised individuals in academic settings, as demonstrated by O'Connor et al. (2021), underlining the challenges they encounter while navigating environments that often suppress their racial and cultural identities. Carla's reflections on her training experiences reveal a deep attachment to her cultural identity and the pain of its suppression in the academic environment. McKenzie-Mavinga (2004) echoes these sentiments, exploring how Black individuals struggle to find their voice and navigate the emotional toll of such suppression, analogous to Carla's experience.

Carla's struggles to express confidence and hopefulness in an oppressive environment further underscore the emotional toll of these experiences. Lo's (2010) reflective accounts illuminate the internal conflict and segregation she faced in a predominantly White institution, emphasising the ongoing struggle for

identity cohesion and the need to validate her worth as a professional. Harris (2007) articulates this struggle, shedding light on the intersectional challenges encountered by minority students and how navigating racial, gendered and professional identities adds layers of emotional complexity in academic institutions. Foster (2004) highlights the absurdity of these challenges, drawing attention to the emotional burdens associated with functioning in environments that devalue minority experiences.

While the literature highlights the emotional challenges marginalised individuals encounter in academia (Dodzo, 2016; Ragaven, 2018; Stewart, 2022), a significant gap exists in developing effective strategies to address these issues in training programmes. This gap underscores the necessity for systematic approaches to creating inclusive environments where students can thrive. For instance, Dodzo (2016) emphasises the importance of persistence in promoting diversity in educational frameworks, advocating for policies that directly support marginalised students, and Yip (2020) outlines practical strategies for navigating identity challenges, reinforcing the critical role of supportive environments in enhancing student resilience.

Nicola's discourse on the difficulty of discussing and challenging racism and preferential treatment reflects the lack of institutional support and acknowledgement for marginalised individuals. Her fear of reprisal underscores the critical need for environments to foster inclusivity and address power dynamics among students. More than a decade earlier, researchers, including Joseph (1995) and Afuape (2004), emphasised the necessity of safe and supportive areas where therapists of colour can freely discuss race and cultivate their professional identity. However, Bonilla-Silva (2015) and Bassett (2021) contend that new concepts and ideas have emerged that may disguise underlying forms of racism, continuing to ostracise and undervalue the experiences of minority students in academic contexts and the establishment of a safe space (Grzanka et al., 2019).

This critique aligns with that of Zhang and Kirby (2024), who suggest that initiatives aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusion often fail due to a lack of genuine commitment from institutional leadership. Superficial implementation of programmes without addressing the core power structures sustaining inequality can lead to further marginalisation of minority groups.

These shortcomings in the existing framework contribute to ongoing challenges faced by Black counselling psychologists, as highlighted by Alleyne

(2004), who explains that superficial diversity efforts can hinder rather than support the professional growth of minority identities.

While establishing support groups and safe spaces is a positive step, substantial institutional changes must accompany these efforts. This includes not only allocating adequate resources, but also fostering an environment where the voices of minority individuals are genuinely heard and valued. Dodzo (2016) argues that actionable changes at the leadership level are necessary for superficial diversity initiatives to yield meaningful progress. Without these critical changes, fields like counselling psychology will likely continue to perpetuate the inequalities they seek to dismantle, as Gillborn et al. (2023) observed, stressing that addressing underlying structural issues is vital for sustainable change in the field. However, while it is easy to critique diversity initiatives as superficial and ineffective, many of these programmes face harsh realities such as funding limitations and institutional pressures that can derail their sustainability. Numerous groups aimed at promoting diversity may have been established only to struggle with long-term viability due to financial constraints. Understanding how much of this ebb and flow relates to funding or institutional priorities could provide valuable insights for improving the implementation of diversity programmes. Addressing these underlying logistical issues may increase the potential for a genuine commitment to diversity, thereby allowing programmes to better support marginalised individuals in academia.

At a deeper level, institutional discourse and power relations shape participants' experiences and identities, perpetuating systemic exclusion and control. Participants' awareness of their position as Black trainees and the consequences of speaking out against racism and discrimination reflects the power dynamics in institutional discourse (Foucault, 1977). Their narrative highlights how institutional structures perpetuate social control and conformity through surveillance and implicit norms. Van Laer and Janssen (2017) illuminate the dynamics behind subtle discrimination in the workplace, emphasising the interplay between power and resistance in individuals' daily experiences. However, while their work offers a valuable theoretical framework for understanding institutional power relations (Benwell & Stokoe, 2013; Foucault, 1977), it lacks actionable recommendations for dismantling these entrenched structures, leaving the mechanisms of exclusion largely intact.

Morillas (2023) argues that critically examining the terms and conditions governing how minorities are invited to participate in organisational structures is crucial. According to Gillborn et al. (2023), meaningful change requires

organisations and institutions to confront their denial and resistance to diversity initiatives. Therefore, understanding these complex power dynamics, particularly the institutional structures perpetuating exclusion, is essential for developing strategies that genuinely support minority students but also foster lasting structural change in academic environments.

Modification and Negotiation of Identities

The negotiation of identity for Black counselling psychologists, particularly in predominantly White professional environments, is a complex process involving subtle and intricate interactions. This section explores how participants navigate their professional and racial identities in these spaces, highlighting the resilience required and the systemic barriers they face. It reveals how these processes reflect broader systemic challenges while providing opportunities for resilience.

The Subtle Nature of Workplace Racism

Mavis's narrative serves as an entry point for understanding the nuanced nature of workplace racism. Her characterisation of racism as 'low-key' and 'insidious' provides a valuable lens for examining the covert persistence of racism in professional environments. This perspective emphasises how racial identity influences professional identity, highlighting the power dynamics inherent in language and knowledge and the systemic barriers perpetuated by disciplinary power (Foucault, 1980; Adetimole et al., 2005). Mavis's description suggests that subtle forms of racism are embedded in everyday interactions, making them difficult to address while remaining key to understanding workplace dynamics. This aligns with earlier work by Sue et al. (2007) and is further echoed by Tinsley-Jones (2001), who discusses the limitations of diversity initiatives in addressing these subtleties. Additionally, drawing on the participants' experiences in this study, Yip (2020) explores strategies that minority psychologists employ to navigate their professional identities amidst these challenges, revealing the resilience and adaptability required in such environments. Yet these acts of navigation occur within a context where professional identity itself is destabilised: while professional titles are typically associated with authority and prestige, racialised constructions of inferiority erode that status. In this sense, language and everyday discourse not only reflect exclusion but actively diminish the legitimacy of minority professionals, undermining the very recognition that professional identity is meant to confer (Sue et al., 2007; Kenny & Briner, 2007; Showunmi, 2023). This dynamic is

evident in Mavis's account, where her description of racism as "low-key" and "insidious" reflects how subtle discursive practices simultaneously sustain exclusion and undermine the professional recognition that her role would otherwise command.

Although Mavis's portrayal aligns with established concepts of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007), it is worth questioning whether these descriptions fully capture the extent of systemic racism's impact. Such subtle forms can be challenging to pinpoint and address, often creating a climate where discriminatory practices are normalised and denied rather than confronted (Tinsley-Jones, 2001; Lo, 2010). Her use of the phrase 'you know' indicates a shared understanding among Black professionals of these pervasive issues, implying that these experiences are part of their everyday reality rather than isolated incidents.

This perspective resonates with the findings of Ragaven (2018) and Odusanya (2016), who observe that racial discrimination in professional settings often manifests in subtle and covert forms, complicating efforts to address such behaviours directly. Fernando (2010) underscores how these subtleties not only reinforce systemic barriers but also impose a significant emotional burden on marginalised individuals in academic and professional environments. According to Sue (2019), while microaggressions perpetuate systemic inequities, the challenge remains in developing effective strategies to confront and dismantle these covert forms of racism, highlighting the urgent need for institutional reforms that extend beyond mere acknowledgement to foster meaningful change.

Sue et al. (2019) propose a strategic framework for addressing microaggressions, designed to promote awareness and understanding of these subtle forms of discrimination. This framework moves beyond coping and survival strategies to outline steps that targets, allies, and bystanders can take. It emphasises micro interventions such as making the invisible visible, disarming microaggressions, educating perpetrators, and seeking external reinforcement or support. However, Osman et al. (2024) argue that despite clear evidence of harm, individuals without experience of racial oppression often struggle to acknowledge microaggressions or their detrimental effects. This lack of understanding can further undermine the effectiveness of support mechanisms intended to address such challenges. Abebe and Harper (2019) reinforce this point, highlighting the lack of support and acknowledgement from colleagues who fail to grasp the pervasive challenges associated with microaggressions. This resonates with the experiences of participants in this study, who described

subtle yet persistent forms of exclusion that were often dismissed or minimised by colleagues, underscoring the gap between the existence of micro interventions in theory and their uptake in practice.

Sue et al. (2019) caution that an emphasis on microaggressions may overshadow the more overt forms of racism that are equally damaging. This raises the concern that privileging subtle discrimination risks minimising the explicit racial injustices that continue to shape professional environments. Researchers, including Bassett (2021), Sue (2013), and Apfelbaum et al. (2008; 2012), contend that strategic concepts developed often sidestep race-related issues directly, thereby perpetuating systemic inequities. Together, these studies underscore the need to address both subtle and overt forms of racism comprehensively, ensuring that professional environments move beyond surface level inclusion toward genuinely equitable and transformative practices.

The Intersection of Identities

In addition to racial identity, it is important to consider intersecting factors such as gender, class and cultural background, which complicate the experiences of Black students and professionals (Crewnshaw, 1989). When examining the interplay between racial and professional identities for this research, it became evident that focusing solely on racial identity would neglect significant complexities that influence the experiences of Black counselling psychologists in predominantly White professional environments. Understanding these nuances is particularly important for individuals identifying as women and Black (Paulraj, 2016; Buckingham, 2008). This concept echoes some participants' narratives in this study. Umaña-Taylor and Rivas-Drake (2021) highlight how intersecting identities such as being both female and Black compound marginalisation and shape unique struggles, resonating with the notion of a 'double minority'.

Earlier work by Harris (2007) identifies the intersection of racial, gendered and professional identities, illustrating how these overlapping factors create multifaceted struggles for acceptance and recognition in predominantly White environments. While this study primarily focused on racial identity, this emphasis risks overlooking the complexities created by intersecting factors such as gender (Opara et al., 2020). Barnes (2022) suggests that individuals with intersecting minority identities face unique challenges and different forms of discrimination. Barrett et al. (2003) argue that a nuanced understanding of intersectionality is critical to mitigating the harms caused by essentialism.

Carla's narrative provides profound insights into negotiating identity in professional environments. Her experiences reveal the complexities of balancing authenticity with the dominant workplace culture (Jackson & Ross-Sheriff, 2016; Barrett et al., 2003; Bell, 1990). As Jackson (2002) suggests, Cultural Contract Theory (CCT) is a valuable framework for understanding these experiences. This theory suggests that individuals enter unspoken contracts in their cultural and professional environments, dictating the acceptable ways of expressing their cultural identities and behaviours. Consequently, these contracts shape how individuals can navigate their roles and assert their authenticity in the face of systemic pressures to conform. Thus, maintaining cultural authenticity while adapting to workplace norms is a significant challenge for many Black professionals (Marshall, 2021).

Bell (1990) highlights the dual pressures experienced by women who must reconcile their cultural identities with the expectations of predominantly White professional environments. However, despite the apparent benefits of bicultural coping strategies, researchers caution that such reliance may shift the burden of adaptation to individuals, thereby obscuring the need for systemic changes in institutions (Alleyne, 2004; Bell, 1990).

Existing studies often treat gender and race as separate categories instead of intersecting identities (Atewologun et al., 2010), making it important to highlight the differences in experiences conveyed by participants. In contrast, Michael, the only male participant, presents challenges in concluding gender dynamics due to the absence of diverse male perspectives. However, Barrett, Cercero and Johnson-Bailey (2003) and Morgan (2020) argue that Black women navigate a delicate balance between their work, racial identity and gender. As Morgan observes, Black women often experience compounded disadvantage in leadership due to the intersection of race and gender biases. While Morgan's work was centred around women's experiences, the concept of intersectionality extends beyond gender alone, offering a critical lens through which to understand how overlapping identities, including race, professional status and socio-economic background, shape varied experiences of inclusion and belonging.

Showumi (2023) poses a provocative question: What has triggered the microaggressions towards Black female leaders? This invites deeper exploration of intersecting factors such as class, which significantly influence access to resources and the complexities of professional identity. Nicola's reflections on the impact of social class resonate with previous research by Van Laer and Janssen

(2017), who emphasise the subtle discrimination and interplay of class in professional settings. Given that these identities are often examined in isolation, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive studies investigating the intersectionality of these constraints. This convergence of identity markers results in compounded marginalisation and identity stripping, as illustrated in Mary's narrative about losing facets of her identity to conform to institutional expectations, a theme echoed by Joseph (1995) and Afuape (2004), who both highlight the psychological toll of institutional conformity and the erasure of cultural selfhood. Taken together, these narratives underscore the necessity of intersectional approaches in counselling psychology research to capture the layered ways race, gender, class, and professional status shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

The Role of Institutions in Perpetuating Racism.

Debbie's critique of institutional racism underscores the complex ways organisational practices and policies disadvantage racial groups. Grzanka et al. (2019) and Roberts et al. (2020) convincingly illustrate systemic issues that contribute to the marginalisation of individuals in professional settings. However, while these studies articulate the presence of such systemic barriers, they fall short of offering robust solutions or actionable frameworks necessary for meaningful institutional reform, a gap also noted by Gillborn et al. (2023) in their analysis of entrenched inequalities in academic structures.

While scholars like Solórzano et al. (2000) advocate for comprehensive reforms, it is important to question whether their proposed measures adequately address the deeply rooted power dynamics that sustain inequality. This critique highlights the reality that many existing diversity initiatives may merely function as facades, failing to effect substantive change. For instance, Gazzola et al. (2011), Van Laer and Janssen (2017), and Fernando (2010) reveal disturbing trends in which institutional practices normalise and legitimise discriminatory behaviour, exacerbating oppression rather than alleviating it.

In light of these systemic failures, individuals in institutions must often adopt strategic approaches to challenge entrenched inequalities. Debbie acknowledges her unique influence in the institution but emphasises the importance of navigating experiences carefully to effect change from within. Ahsan (2020) argues that White psychologists must move beyond complicity, intellectualisation, avoidance and denial, and instead centre their discomfort with Whiteness (Bailwani, 2023). Such introspection is crucial for creating an

environment where racial dynamics can be openly addressed and dismantled. Debbie's reflections illustrate both the potential and the limitations of these strategies, as her ability to influence is constantly constrained by the very structures she seeks to challenge.

However, the challenges presented by social identity theory complicate this. Social identity theory suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group membership, which can lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup exclusion, dynamics that subtly reinforce institutional racism (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Tajfel et al., 1979). Swann et al. (2009) underscore how identity fusion in ingroups can intensify resistance to acknowledging racial inequities, thereby entrenching silence around race. Therefore, while Ahsan's framework provides valuable steps toward addressing microaggressions and racism, it is equally essential for institutions to confront and dismantle the underlying biases that perpetuate these environments.

This highlights an uncomfortable truth emphasised by Johansson et al. (2023) and Adetimole et al. (2005); Black professionals often find themselves in the role of educators on racial issues, raising fundamental ethical concerns about the expectations placed on them (Morgan, 2021). The situational pressure, coupled with the emotional toll of confronting racism, can lead to the internalisation of negative experiences, significantly influencing self-perception and social interactions (Helms, 1995). Sue et al. (2007) and Evans & Moore (2015) argue that the demands of this emotional labour are not merely taxing; they also risk hindering professional growth, as Black professionals navigate the dual burdens of performing their roles while educating others about racism and discrimination.

Fernando (2010) convincingly argues that racialised dynamics in therapeutic situations mirror broader societal issues that demand reform. This invites critical examination of current frameworks, not just for professionals in the discipline but for society as a whole. Farooq et al. (2022) argue that it is essential to examine the theoretical underpinnings of clinical work alongside the practical implications of these frameworks as a means of responding to these challenges. Such examination must also consider how these theories impact minority groups both in and outside the profession. For Debbie and others navigating institutional barriers, this means reform cannot remain abstract or theoretical but must translate into tangible practices that genuinely reflect and respond to the diverse experiences of minorities.

Experiences of Self-Doubt and Blame.

Nicola's observation of widespread self-doubt and blame among Black counselling psychologists underscores the pervasive impact of systemic racism and the burden of having to educate others. This impact resonates with Carla's experiences, where the pressure to conform to the expectations of a predominantly White professional landscape likewise resulted in feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. It also reflects earlier work by Abebe and Harper (2019), Atayero et al. (2021) and Showunmi (2023). Grzanka et al. (2019) articulate the disconcerting reality faced by Black professionals as they navigate racial issues in predominantly White environments, a reality that raises profound ethical concerns about the significant expectations placed upon them (Brown et al., 2023).

The psychological burden of consistently confronting racism can lead to the internalisation of negative experiences, significantly influencing self-perception and social interactions (Helms, 1995). This internalisation further complicates the process of identity negotiation, highlighting how systemic barriers impede professional growth and contribute to compounded feelings of self-doubt. Marsh et al. (2021) report that emotional challenges faced by racial and ethnic minority students often intersect, exacerbating their experiences of self-doubt and ambiguity in their professional identities. O'Connor et al. (2021) highlight that the challenges posed by this emotional labour are not merely burdensome and stressful; they also risk obstructing career advancement, as individuals juggle professional responsibilities while simultaneously addressing oppression and managing its emotional impact (Lavalley & Johnson, 2020).

Coping Mechanisms

Belinda's approach to handling racial discrimination is rooted in spirituality and biculturalism. By embracing dual cultural perspectives and interpreting experiences through a spiritual lens, she cultivates resilience and reframes potentially discriminatory encounters in ways that affirm her identity. These coping mechanisms reflect broader patterns identified by Jacob et al. (2023), who found that spirituality serves as a key resource for Black individuals navigating race-related stress, offering emotional regulation and empowerment in the face of systemic adversity.

Harris (2007) argues that negative experiences of discrimination and stereotypes compel many minorities to develop strategic coping mechanisms that blend cultural backgrounds, enabling them to transcend and resist

professional obstacles. Ting-Toomey (1999) adds that spirituality engages with a continuum of conscious, unconscious, and existential dimensions, capturing the full spectrum of discriminatory experiences.

However, the literature suggests that the complex interplay of cultural, situational and personal factors significantly shapes how individuals respond to discrimination. Understanding the cultural environment in which minority professionals navigate their identities is therefore essential (Anastasi, 2021). Ting-Toomey (2015) emphasises the inherent complexity of this process, noting that navigating multiple identities can lead to fragmentation rather than integration of one's self-concept. This fragmentation often exacerbates feelings of insecurity, significantly affecting psychological well-being. Osman et al. (2024) argue that discrimination functions as a substantial stressor, particularly when perceived as uncontrollable and unpredictable, with broad implications for mental and physical health.

Michael's narrative also emphasises individual responsibility, particularly the importance of intelligence, articulation and consistency in professional settings to counteract racial stereotypes. His strategic approach to navigating prejudicial perceptions involves choosing when to confront issues directly and when to address them more subtly. According to Higginbotham et al. (2006), this pragmatic discourse aligns with respectability politics, wherein individuals from marginalised groups adopt behaviours and attitudes deemed acceptable by the dominant culture to gain respect and avoid discrimination.

This concern is echoed by Bonilla-Silva (2018), who believes that respectability politics may inadvertently validate the stereotypes and structures of oppression that these strategies seek to counter (Ngadjui, 2022). Atewologun and Singh (2010) explore how UK Black professionals navigate the construction of their ethnic and gender identities at work. They reveal that ethnicity and gender, and their intersection, play crucial roles in identity construction. They found that Black professionals frequently encounter identity-challenging situations while interacting with explicit and implicit models of race and stereotyping. For instance, male professionals like Michael often employ agentic strategies to advance their careers, drawing strength from their identities as Black men. This decision-making reflects agency and aligns with his pragmatic approach to confronting discrimination and stereotypes (Banks, 2006). In contrast, female professionals like Belinda tend to rely more on reframing focused strategies to protect or restore their identities. This distinction underscores the continuous identity work required by Black professionals and

further highlights their unique, gendered experiences in predominantly White workplaces.

However, Debbie's approach to racial discrimination, which focuses on institutional reform and strategic advocacy, provides a nuanced perspective compared to Atewologun and Singh's (2010) findings. Debbie's strategy, which involves leveraging her institutional position to advocate for systemic changes, contrasts with the article's depiction of women's more reframing-focused approaches. Her proactive stance aligns more closely with the agentic strategies often associated with men, suggesting that women in influential positions may also adopt assertive strategies when working to transform systemic structures.

This divergence highlights a potential limitation in the assumptions presented by Atewologun and Singh, indicating that women's identity strategies are not monolithic and can include significant efforts toward institutional change. Thus, acknowledging the diverse strategies employed by professionals like Debbie is key to understanding individual coping mechanisms and the broader institutional changes necessary to support marginalised groups effectively.

The Professional Landscape of Counselling Psychology

The participants' reflections on counselling psychology and clinical psychology training reveal the deeply entrenched relationship between clinical psychology and the NHS (Warwick, 2022). Their narratives highlight this connection primarily through the funding structure, employment opportunities and the integration of placements across various NHS organisations. These factors collectively solidify the identity of clinical psychologists within the NHS framework, aligning with Vasquez and Bingham's (2012) findings regarding the legitimacy clinical psychology has achieved in the UK, owing to its historical ties to the NHS. This solidification of clinical psychology's identity reflects the social hierarchy of the profession, as argued by Gazzola et al. (2011), who note that external institutions often contribute to this hierarchy through a perceived lack of knowledge about the field.

In contrast, Mary's reflection on the efforts of counselling psychology to achieve parity with clinical psychology highlights an ongoing struggle for professional recognition. Her repeated use of 'we' suggests a collective experience among counselling psychologists asserting their identity, a theme that Kasket and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) support. They argue that the competitive nature of professional recognition and resource allocation compounds this struggle. Nielsen et al. (2016) identify employment and employability as the central

challenges facing counselling psychologists in the UK, a sentiment echoed by several participants in this study who expressed similar concerns regarding their professional trajectories and the competitive landscape they navigate.

Nielsen et al. (2016) reveal that, given the ongoing structural changes in organisations like the NHS, counselling psychologists face increasing pressure to deliver effective treatment services while operating in a more cost-conscious environment. This observation aligns with the conclusions of Farooq et al.

(2022), who argue that such pressures affect service delivery and foster a competitive atmosphere that prioritises cost-effective services, potentially undermining the core principles of counselling psychology.

As these internal and external pressures interact, the struggles for professional identity and challenges related to employment underscore the complexities counselling psychologists face in asserting their place in the broader psychological landscape. This is also illustrated by Mrdjenovich and Moore (2004), who suggest that identity crises among counselling psychologists are often exacerbated by the systemic challenges inherent in the profession. These identity challenges resonate with participants' sentiments in this research and with earlier work by Odusanya (2016) on the experiences of BAME psychologists, indicating that specific demographics in the field may encounter additional, often overlooked barriers in discussions surrounding professional identity. Indeed, Atewologun and Singh (2010) show that the intersection of ethnicity and gender shapes Black professionals' identity work; Black women in particular negotiate distinctive constraints, underscoring the need for inclusive practices that recognise intersectional complexities in professional identity formation.

This aligns with Burr's (1995) social constructionist perspective, positing that social interactions and the prevailing social order shape individuals' understanding of their identities. Foucault's (1978) exploration of societal perceptions provides insight into how these perceptions are constructed and wield power over personal identity through normalisation and discourse. He argues that the framing of professions, including counselling psychology in institutional environments, influences practitioners' understanding and expression of their professional identities. This is supported by Palmqvist (2016), who highlights how institutional and societal perceptions inherently influence the professional identity of counselling psychologists, raising critical questions about what constitutes acceptable professional behaviour and knowledge.

Du Bois's (1903) concept of double consciousness underscores the complexity of identity formation in hierarchical structures. The duality of striving to be seen as equal while preserving a unique professional identity presents significant challenges.

Mary's phrase 'seen as equal, but different' reflects an awareness of the inherent tensions in navigating these dual identities, particularly for individuals who may experience marginalisation because of race or other identity factors (Abebe & Harper, 2019; Sue et al., 2007). Freeman and Kocak (2023) argue that these nuances are particularly relevant for counselling psychology, given the profession's commitment to social justice and the prevailing lack of intentionally created environments promoting inclusivity. Such inclusivity should be embedded in governance, policies, theoretical frameworks and research, rather than treated as an optional addition.

Michael's account exemplifies counselling psychologists' burdens, highlighting the difficulty of explaining and legitimising their role to colleagues unfamiliar with the profession. Davies (2015) echoes this sentiment, arguing that a lack of awareness regarding counselling psychologists' unique contributions among allied health professionals perpetuates misunderstandings and complicates efforts to define and legitimise the profession. This disconnect presents an individual challenge for practitioners like Michael and a systemic issue resonating with Grzanka et al. (2019), who assert that ongoing power dynamics in the field can marginalise counselling psychologists and their contributions.

Michael's assertion of knowing 'who he is' as a counselling psychologist also implies an understanding of his professional identity. However, Idowu (2017) suggests that this understanding is not uniformly recognised or accepted among counselling psychologists nor within institutional frameworks. This dynamic aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital, where specific professional identities and forms of knowledge are privileged, leading to power imbalances and exclusionary practices in the profession (Huan, 2019). According to Grzanka et al. (2020), these forms of cultural capital reinforce existing hierarchies in professions and clinical settings, thus marginalising those who do not conform to dominant norms.

Mary's narrative regarding the 'point system' and the need to gain more 'clout' on qualification sheds light on how individuals navigate and challenge this framework. However, as Lavoie (2014) points out, facilitating this point system

leads to the reproduction of a hierarchy that divides individuals and perpetuates ideologies controlling professional identity discourse (Foucault, 1980). This dynamic suggests that while individuals attempt to accumulate cultural capital for professional advancement, they may inadvertently reinforce a system that does not serve inclusivity and equity interests in the profession.

While critiqued for being overly deterministic and potentially neglecting individual agency, Foucault's concepts of power and discourse illustrate how professional identities are constructed through language and social practices in institutions (Foucault, 1980). This framework facilitates a critical examination of how counselling psychologists navigate their roles in institutions like the NHS, where they may be compelled to justify their position and expertise in a system that often privileges other professional identities. Such dynamics are echoed by Gazzola et al. (2011), who argue that the perceived legitimacy of clinical psychology overshadows the unique contributions of counselling psychologists, creating additional barriers to identity affirmation.

However, Foucault's perspective does not account for the variability among counselling psychologists, whose professional identities differ significantly due to race, gender and institution (Verling, 2014). These differences lead to varied approaches to how individuals challenge and transform institutional norms rather than merely navigating them. For instance, Abebe and Harper (2019) highlight how Black and minority ethnic counsellors encounter distinct challenges in asserting their professional identities in predominantly White institutions, illustrating the intersectionality of identity in counselling psychology.

The struggle for recognition extends beyond individual experiences to encompass broader professional challenges. As Warwick (2022) notes, the structural dynamics in the NHS significantly influence the professional trajectories of counselling psychologists, emphasising the need for systemic change to create an equitable environment. Foucault's (1972) concept of 'power-knowledge' expands this discourse, suggesting that knowledge is not neutral but serves as a control mechanism over individuals. This aligns with the findings of Grzanka et al. (2020), who argue that knowledge production in institutions often reinforces existing power structures, making it important for counselling psychologists to navigate and potentially resist these dynamics.

Thus, the challenge lies in balancing a critique of power dynamics with acknowledging the practical needs of professionals operating in these systems (Damaschin, 2014). This necessitates a multidimensional approach to understanding professional identity in counselling psychology that recognises the

complexities of individual experiences and the institutional frameworks that shape them.

Counselling Psychology's Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

The participants' reflections on counselling psychology's approach to diversity and inclusiveness underscore the profession's commitment to embracing individual differences and providing opportunities for minorities (BPS, 2020). Michael articulates how the field's phenomenological approach, which emphasises understanding individuals' unique experiences, has opened doors for Black and ethnic minority people to enter the world of psychology. This perspective is supported by longitudinal research conducted by Norcross, Sayette and Martin-Wagner (2020) who tracked doctoral training in APA accredited counselling psychology programmes over 20 years. Their study revealed a pronounced increase in the proportion of ethnic minority students in these programmes, suggesting a significant shift toward greater inclusivity.

However, it remains uncertain how these findings reflect the racial and ethnic composition of the UK population, as data specific to UK counselling psychology programmes are not readily available. This uncertainty invites caution when directly comparing their findings with the overall UK population. Michael's statement, "counselling psychology was a door through which many minorities have gained access to the world of psychology," suggests that the field has not only committed to but also succeeded in attracting a more diverse student body, playing a crucial role in promoting diversity. Yet, the population of incoming doctoral students still does not fully mirror the racial composition of the population they aim to serve (Carachilo et al., 2022).

While this positive trend aligns with the broader goals of counselling psychology to foster an inclusive environment, Michael also acknowledges systemic biases, stating, "The biases are there because the biases are embedded in the system". This reflects a persistent tension between inclusivity efforts and institutional barriers (O'Connor et al., 2021). Thus, examining the dichotomy between the field's inclusivity initiatives and the persistent structural obstacles that hinder genuine equity is essential. Gergen's (1994) assertion that social structures and interactions significantly influence individual identity and opportunities further complicates this narrative. It begs the question of whether counselling psychology, despite its inclusive intentions, has effectively counteracted the embedded systemic biases without broader institutional reforms.

According to Johansson et al. (2023), recognising diversity can lead to misrecognition, where individuals are perceived as symbols rather than complex beings with unique identities and contributions. Nevertheless, these recognition efforts, while flawed, are preferable to inaction, as they facilitate meaningful dialogues and serve as a critical foundation for pursuing deeper systemic reforms.

The emphasis on phenomenological approaches and individual experiences may inadvertently obscure the need for systemic change. For instance, Pieterse et al. (2023) argue that addressing structural inequities is necessary for efforts to promote diversity to remain substantive. They caution that counselling psychology's current methodologies may be insufficient to confront the entrenched biases of institutional frameworks. This line is supported by Flores et al. (2023), who assert that making authentic progress requires a dual approach, combining individual resilience with systemic interventions.

Belinda's narrative further illustrates these complexities, offering poignant insights into the identity of Black counselling psychologists in predominantly White professional environments. Her experience of being "the only Black counselling psychologist" in various workplaces highlights the visibility of her racial identity and its impact on her professional interactions (Pieterse et al., 2023). Such visibility often results in her being identified by clients as "the Black psych," reducing her professional identity to her racial identity. According to Hindess (2006), this phenomenon can be seen as a practice of power through the strategic game of liberation and domination over those not in a position to choose, thereby maintaining a societal consensus that fails to address the needs of minorities. Jones et al. (2004) refer to this as the structural component that sustains racism (McDowell, 2008; Swann et al., 2009; Bell, 1990), reinforcing stereotypes rather than dismantling them (Johansson et al., 2023).

Belinda's ability to navigate these environments with composure, exemplified by her laughter in response to clients' remarks, suggests developed resilience and a performative aspect of her professional demeanour. This aligns with Goffman's (1963) notion of the presentation of self, where individuals manage their behaviours to fit social expectations. Her engagement with her spiritual side provides a means to cope with and respond to her "predominantly White environment," thereby preserving her sense of self and empowering her to manage her professional identity (Sue et al., 2009b), which aligns with Watson's (2004) observations on the role of spirituality in professional contexts.

While her discourse resonates with the findings of Lo (2010), Yazar (1996) and Afuape (2004), all emphasising the importance of individual coping strategies in the face of systemic barriers, one might critique the reliance on individual mechanisms as a solution to systemic issues. Although personal resilience and spiritual engagement can be powerful tools for navigating professional spaces, they do not address the root causes of exclusion and marginalisation (Afuape, 2004; Yazar, 1996). This risks shifting responsibility onto individuals to adapt to unjust environments rather than compelling institutions to transform them (Daloye, 2022). Ultimately, Flores et al. (2023) argue that systemic changes are necessary to create genuinely inclusive professional environments; individual coping strategies may serve only as temporary relief without such changes.

In recent years, the increased visibility of the psychological impact of racial identity and discrimination, particularly concerning mental health, has been catalysed by global social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter and heightened scrutiny of racial disparities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bassett, 2021; Chastney, 2024). These developments have encouraged the field of psychology to engage more openly with the mental health consequences of racial trauma, identity-based exclusion and systemic marginalisation (Sue et al., 2007). While mainstream psychology has often been criticised for perpetuating colour-blind frameworks (Helms, 1990), counselling psychology, with its humanistic, reflexive and relational emphasis, has increasingly positioned itself to challenge these limitations (Pieterse et al., 2023). Nevertheless, researchers, including Ayyildiz (2020) and Flores et al. (2023) argue that structural inequities remain deeply embedded in training programmes, often undermining these inclusive intentions. The experiences of racialised counselling psychologists, marked by misrecognition, isolation and identity-based scrutiny, underscore the enduring gap between espoused values of inclusion and the systemic reforms necessary to meaningfully support mental health and identity development in the profession. These emotional consequences, ranging from chronic stress and imposter syndrome to burnout, highlight the need for institutional support structures that prioritise psychological safety and well-being for racialised practitioners. Thus, while counselling psychology embraces a relational ethos with potential for transformative inclusion, its impact remains limited without structural accountability.

Nicola's account further elucidates the systemic exclusion and marginalisation of Black counselling psychologists in the NHS. Her stark statement, "You will never see them in the NHS", highlights the underrepresentation and potential disenchantment of Black counselling

psychologists with NHS employment. This exclusionary environment may drive them towards private practice or other institutions perceived as more inclusive. Nicola's narrative depicts the NHS as an institution where Black counselling psychologists are conspicuously absent, shedding light on the systemic barriers contributing to their underrepresentation. According to Rhead et al. (2021), ethnic minority psychologists are far less likely to achieve career progression or be accepted into specific psychology divisions such as clinical psychology. This trend highlights the connection between the NHS and the clinical psychology field, suggesting that various factors, including biased recruitment practices, a lack of mentorship opportunities and inadequate support for professional development, significantly hinder their advancement. This observation aligns with Foucault's (1980) concept of power-knowledge, indicating that institutional structures perpetuate specific power dynamics that effectively exclude marginalised groups. Here, inclusion is framed not as genuine equity but as regulation, producing minority practitioners as simultaneously necessary and subordinate (Foucault, 1977).

While counselling psychology remains underrepresented in the NHS, it nonetheless maintains a presence. For example, NHS Talking Therapies are accessed by over a million people annually, yet persistent inequalities remain. According to the Race Equality Foundation (2022), Black and minoritised ethnic groups are significantly underrepresented in psychological therapy roles and face systemic barriers to access and progression. The NHS Race and Health Observatory (2022) reports that individuals from racialised communities experience longer waiting times, lower treatment rates following referral and poorer outcomes compared to White British groups. These disparities highlight the urgent need to address the underrepresentation of Black and ethnic minority counselling psychologists in NHS services, despite their participation in the system.

While little has been explicitly documented about Black counselling psychologists and their experiences in the NHS, a growing body of research highlights the prevalence of racial inequalities and harassment faced by Black and ethnic minority staff (Chastney, 2024). The 2019 TIDES survey, which examined the impact of discrimination and harassment on London-based healthcare practitioners, reveals that Black and ethnic minority staff, along with women, migrants, nurses and healthcare assistants, are at significantly higher risk of encountering these negative behaviours (Rhead et al., 2021). This study underscores the substantial impact of these experiences on mental and physical

health, job satisfaction and absenteeism, indicating an urgent need for focused research and effective interventions to mitigate these issues in the NHS.

If the NHS, a major public institution, continues to exhibit such exclusionary practices, what implications does this have for smaller or less regulated organisations? Without significant systemic change, efforts to promote diversity will remain superficial and ineffective. Baslari (2020) notes that inclusivity initiatives often fail to address the more profound systemic issues that create and sustain barriers for marginalised groups. Her work highlights the necessity for comprehensive strategies that go beyond surface-level interventions.

Carla's reflections on the scarcity of Black psychologists in London reveal deep concern about the underrepresentation of minorities in the profession. Her poignant statement, "Where are all the Black Psychologists?" indicates a troubling awareness of the lack of diversity in the field, even in a cosmopolitan city like London. This concern is also underscored by Daloye's (2022) study on the experiences of Black and ethnic minority trainees in counselling psychology.

This concern further highlights the ongoing struggle of Black counselling psychologists for visibility and recognition. Belinda's recounting of her early experiences in predominantly White schools and workplaces suggests that a lifetime of navigating these environments has profoundly shaped her professional identity. Her statement, "I was prepared for it", reflects a sense of resignation and readiness to operate in these spaces. This experience aligns with the findings of Abebe and Harper (2019), who emphasise that BAME counsellors in the UK often face systemic barriers that complicate their visibility in professional settings. Additionally, Afuape (2004) discusses the challenges that Black women psychologists encounter in predominantly White environments, emphasising the identity negotiation that Belinda experiences. This positions her as both a product of and participant in broader societal power dynamics, emphasising the continuous negotiation of her identity in professional settings. As Davies (2015) notes, the importance of diversity in the profession cannot be overstated; however, compensating for the lack of representation presents multifaceted challenges that ongoing efforts must address.

The narratives of the participants reveal the intricate dynamics of professional identity formation in the hierarchical and exclusionary structures of institutions like the NHS. The interrelationship between clinical psychology and the NHS, the struggle for recognition, and the importance of group solidarity

collectively highlight the challenges faced by Black counselling psychologists. These narratives reinforce the urgent need for institutional reforms that promote equitable recognition and support, ensuring that diverse skills and contributions are genuinely valued in the profession.

Selfhood

The participants' narratives illustrate the profound connection between personal identity and professional expertise among Black counselling psychologists. In these accounts, the Black counselling psychologist holds substantial power and authority over those perceived as vulnerable. This dynamic underscores a critical responsibility to understand and manage their roles as experts, recognising inherent power imbalances and navigating the potential negative implications of authority. In this context, the participants' motivations for joining the profession emerge as reflections of both their identities and the professional roles they aspire to cultivate.

For example, Belinda's and Michael's stories emphasise the necessity of self-awareness and self-regulation, qualities that resonate with counselling psychology's value of introspection and continuous self-development. However, their narratives suggest that understanding professional identity encompasses not only skills and knowledge, but also the broader socio-political context in which these identities are formed and the power that comes with professional positioning. As a significant aspect of identity, race influences how individuals perceive themselves and others, making it a critical factor in professional identity formation (Sindic et al., 2015; D'Mello et al., 2020). This notion aligns with Sue et al. (2008), who argue that self-reflection is crucial for minority professionals navigating the dual roles of advocacy and representation.

Alleyne (2004) presents an important framework for examining the professional identity of Black professionals. She suggests that many carry the weight of 'post-slavery traumatic stress syndrome', resulting in a post-colonial, post-slavery environment whose effects are transmitted across generations. This perspective highlights the complex challenges that some minority practitioners face, necessitating a reflective practice to reconcile personal and professional identities amidst systemic disparities. Thus, Alleyne's framework underscores that historical and socio-political narratives deeply inform professional identity formation. Ngadjui et al. (2024) suggest that the reflective practices of minority counsellors differ fundamentally from those of their White counterparts, particularly in how cultural identity informs self-reflection. Debbie's assertion that "the way I practice reflects who I am" emphasises her recognition of the

sociopolitical relations connected to her identities. This sentiment resonates with Constantine and Sue (2006), who argue that minority professionals engage in reflection with a heightened awareness of their racial and ethnic identities, as well as the systemic biases that influence their practice.

Additionally, Grzanka et al. (2019) provide a critical lens on how White supremacy permeates counselling psychology. Their framework highlights that systemic biases shape not only the experiences of Black psychologists but also those of the clients they serve. This reinforces the idea that professional identity formation for Black counselling psychologists is not merely a personal achievement but also a negotiation against historical injustices that continue to shape practice. Carter et al. (2018) argue that discrimination directly correlates with professional outcomes and satisfaction, highlighting how external systemic factors constrain both identity and efficacy.

Verling (2014) assert that counselling psychology's humanistic philosophy prevents the profession from encompassing a singular professional identity; rather, it comprises multiple identities shaped by a range of factors. This plurality enables participants to cultivate identities that resonate with their core values and relationships. However, the notion of autonomy in identity construction appeared nuanced and contested. Nicola's narrative, for example, describes the professional identity of Black counselling psychologists as simultaneously self-governed and vulnerable to external forces. This finding aligns with Gazzola et al. (2001), who highlight the difficulty of maintaining professional identity amid social expectations and personal realities.

The struggle for authenticity, as articulated by Debbie, underscores these tensions. Her assertion of being "true to myself" highlights the challenges Black counselling psychologists face in maintaining a cohesive identity amidst societal pressures. These pressures have also been linked to increased psychological strain, including identity fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and professional burnout (Sue et al., 2007; Chastney, 2024). Foucault's (1980) discussions on power relations illuminate how societal norms shape individual subjectivities, often leading to internal conflict for minority practitioners striving for authenticity.

Wyatt et al. (2020) expand on this by arguing that minority professionals often navigate multiple, conflicting identities shaped by systemic bias and cultural dissonance. They describe this process as a constant negotiation, which amplifies the importance of collective experiences in fostering shared understanding among minority practitioners. This perspective supports

participants' emphasis on the collective nature of identity construction. However, Foucault would caution against viewing dissonance solely as intrapsychic, positioning it instead as rooted in socio-political and historical contexts. From this perspective, dissonance emerges not only individually but also through the collective experience of marginalisation.

This collective orientation is reinforced by participants' reflections on relationships and the necessity for congruence in their identities. Their narratives illustrate how they strive to align professional practices with personal values and political commitments, showing that self-regulation is informed by both individual aspirations and the broader socio-political context. Here, congruence serves as a way of navigating dissonance collectively, reinforcing the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences.

This orientation also illuminates the participants' philanthropic motivations, which emphasise their role within a larger social and cultural environment. Their experiences of dissonance, the historical narratives of their communities, and their commitment to social justice and equity appear to drive their philanthropic actions.

This extends the initial understanding of their motivation to join the profession and reaffirms Foucault's (1980) concept of the 'technology of the self', which serves as a theoretical framework for exploring professional motivation and identity formation. While Foucault emphasises the individual's role in shaping self-conception through reflection and self-regulation, it is evident that, for the participants, this process is equally informed by collective experience and community engagement. In this context, they navigate their identities not solely as individuals but as members of a community, where personal values and social justice are mutually reinforcing. Their professional practice thus reflects the complex interplay between individual agency and communal responsibility in shaping professional identity.

The Construction of a Cohesive Identity

The construction of a cohesive professional identity among participants is a complex process that intertwines both external and internal networks, shared knowledge and understanding. As such, professional relationships are pivotal in shaping one's identity, offering crucial support and guidance. This process involves not only the inclusion of like-minded individuals but also assimilation into broader professional networks. These dynamics reinforce the notion that

professional identity is continuously negotiated and developed through interactions across various social and professional contexts.

Michael's account highlights the significance of "helpful" encounters in his progression toward becoming a counselling psychologist, particularly as he reflects on the pivotal guidance received from his professors. Yet, his assumption that such support is universally accessible obscures its selective nature, which often excludes minority groups. This reflects a historical reality concerning the isolation and exclusion of the 'other' (Rasmussen, 2011; Atewologun et al., 2010). Bourdieu (1986) theorises that such selective access perpetuates a stratified social order, mirroring broader societal hierarchies of class and gender (Huan, 2019).

While some perspectives suggest that knowledge can be gleaned from objective observations of professional behaviour and identity, social constructionists contend that this view is overly simplistic. They argue instead that knowledge is not neutral but shaped by their social relationships and the imperative to maintain connections that reflect societal expectations and demands (Anderson, 2012).

Michael's narrative both reflects and reinforces privileged access, sustaining the social power structure that excludes the 'other'. This assertion aligns with Foucault's (1999) concept of knowledge and power, emphasising that the rationalisation of exclusion is not merely an individual issue but a systemic one. Deconstructing otherness is also a significant feature of the literature on race, as Baslari (2020) asserts that internalised racism can be seen as a response to oppression. This observation is critical, as it implies that one of the effects of oppression is the development of internalised racism.

Wodak (2012) and Wade (2004) further explore this dynamic, with Wade arguing that race acts as an embedded cultural category in the human experience. This embedding significantly affects how individuals navigate professional landscapes, particularly Black counselling psychologists who contend with the duality of their racial identities and professional roles (Odusany, 2016). Although Michael's adaptation to these systemic barriers may initially appear necessary (Lavalley & Johnson, 2020), it risks perpetuating the very structures it seeks to navigate, reflecting Collins' (2000) critique of internalised oppression in marginalised groups.

Swann et al. (2009) argue that identity negotiation frequently involves striving for self-verification. This concept elucidates why some Black

professionals emphasise commonalities with others to sustain a coherent self-concept. Conversely, Comas-Díaz (2000) suggests that the act of assimilation among Black professionals may inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes in their relationships, complicating countertransference and exacerbating discrimination. These dynamics can result in professional relationships built on trauma, ultimately contributing to an incongruent identity (Winnicott, 1986).

This viewpoint contrasts with that of other participants, who assert that mastering professional relationships is insufficient without a solid understanding of one's authentic self (Shah et al., 2012). However, the journey of self-discovery emerges as complex and laden with internal and external challenges. For instance, Debbie emphasises this complexity when she states, "You have to be in tune with who you are', 'relationships create an extension of you". This assertion raises a critical question: To what extent can critical self-reflection be achieved in a profession where systemic barriers inhibit personal growth and constrain the navigation of power dynamics?

In light of Alleyne's (2005) assessment of internalised oppression, it is evident that the internalisation of societal norms affects individual self-perception while reinforcing harmful dynamics in the community. Sharma (2005) and Lawrence (2003) illustrate this point by recounting their experiences, demonstrating how social conditioning embeds indifference and intolerance, leading to the normalisation and pathologisation of their behaviours.

The participants' narratives exemplify the dual role of professional relationships in shaping both personal and professional spheres. This is key; when individuals carry the weight of historical oppression in specific environments, their capacity for self-advocacy is limited by prevailing power dynamics. This perspective aligns with Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation. Debbie's assertion that professional relationships "create an extension of you," also emphasises the necessity of kinship and the vulnerabilities inherent in these relationships, echoing previous work by Crocker et al. (2000) on the importance of solidarity and belonging.

Recognising these dynamics, it is important to acknowledge that the experiences of Black and minority individuals are not monolithic. Individual differences in background and strategy can lead to varying approaches to navigating predominantly White environments. While cultural connectedness provides critical support, an overly simplistic view that prioritises this aspect may overlook the complexities of professional dynamics, thus highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of these issues in diverse contexts.

These identity negotiations, particularly when shaped by pressure to assimilate or resist stereotyping, can contribute to chronic emotional dissonance and psychological strain. Research increasingly shows that racialised professionals face elevated risks of burnout, imposter syndrome and reduced well-being as a result of navigating exclusionary professional landscapes (Sue et al., 2007; Chastney, 2024).

Building on these identity dynamics, it becomes apparent that critiques of self-awareness underscore a hierarchical view prevalent among Black counselling psychologists. The Nigrescence Model proposed by Cross (1971; 1995) offers a valuable framework for understanding the stages of racial identity development, yet it is crucial to emphasise that this process is not linear. Individuals often fluctuate between stages based on their contextual experiences.

Many participants expressed a desire to avoid embodying certain stereotypes (Banks, 2006). This avoidance may lead them to distance themselves from their cultural roots, inadvertently reinforcing exclusion even as they attempt to mitigate stereotyping (Worrell et al., 2023; Ragaven, 2018). Such dynamics highlight the paradox faced by Black counselling psychologists: strategies of adaptation meant to resist exclusion can, in turn, generate new forms of marginalisation within the professional landscape.

Race in Context

The discourse surrounding race and professional identity is complex and embodies an ideology of humanity that is deeply rooted in historically entrenched belief systems (Appiah & Gates, 1996; Ossorio & Duster, 2005). It operates not merely as a social construct but as a pervasive force that significantly influences professional identity construction. Participants illustrate this dynamic, with Mary asserting that race shapes her experiences and relationships. By contrast, Gonzalez-Smith et al. (2014) emphasise the critical need for political awareness, highlighting the ongoing power imbalances rooted in histories of privilege and oppression relative to their White peers. This raises important questions about whether current policies can meaningfully address systemic issues in the profession.

Proshansky and Newton (1973) assert that continuous cultural and political attunement among minority professionals is not simply desirable but essential for effectively navigating systemic challenges. Collins (2000) contends that while personal vigilance and kinship networks offer important support, these burdens will persist unless professional environments are restructured to foster

genuine inclusivity (Dixon et al., 2023; Cazer & Creary, 2016). Yet disagreement remains over the most effective strategies for addressing these challenges (Brown & Mousa, 2023).

Echoing this sentiment, Carla notes that achieving authenticity requires conscious resistance to conformity while embracing one's true self amid systemic barriers. This aligns with Helms' racial identity development model, which emphasises confronting societal pressures to foster a genuine sense of self. However, the pressure to conform can be overwhelming, at times compelling individuals to compromise their authenticity in exchange for acceptance in professional or social environments.

Resistance is not merely an individual act but a collective effort to oppose dominant power structures and affirm both professional and racial identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For Black counselling psychologists, this struggle transcends avoiding distortion or control; it represents an active demand for authenticity and genuine representation in their professional spaces. Collins (2000) suggests that such counteraction fosters personal growth and highlights the potential for systemic change by reinforcing individual authenticity. However, Morgan (2008) cautions that this places a disproportionate burden of responsibility on the minority.

D'Mello et al. (2020) emphasise that identity is fundamentally shaped by the conditions in which individuals operate. These conditions influence not only self-perception but also how individuals are perceived by others (Mrdjenovich & Moore, 2004). Participants described facing normative expectations that create internalised pressures to conform, illustrating how racial contexts can distort professional identity development. Supportive professional environments are therefore essential for enabling resistance and affirming authenticity.

The interplay of cultural connectedness, self-awareness and systemic challenges exposes the complexities inherent in constructing a cohesive professional identity for Black counselling psychologists. As Ragaven (2018) notes, recognising these dynamics is imperative for reforms that genuinely embrace inclusivity and empower diverse identities. Thus, the profession must confront these realities directly if it is to ensure that all voices are represented.

While these findings illuminate processes of identity formation and adaptation, they also raise deeper questions about how counselling psychology itself perpetuates dominant norms and systemic exclusion. The underrepresentation of Black voices is not simply a matter of individual choice or access but reflects entrenched power structures and dominant narratives that dictate whose knowledge and identity are

legitimised in therapeutic and academic spaces (Patel, 2011). This exclusion manifests in recruitment challenges, training practices and epistemic silencing, where Whiteness becomes the unspoken framework. The marginalisation of minority voices is therefore not accidental but systemic, requiring deliberate dismantling. Without confronting these larger structures, efforts to build inclusive professional identities risk being reduced to individual coping strategies for what is a collective and institutional issue (Moodley & Palmer, 2006).

Conclusion

This final chapter revisits the research question and explains the significance and implications of the findings and the contribution that this study makes. It will also set out the limitations of the study and lay out questions for further research.

Summary and Conclusion

This investigation into the construction of racial and professional identities among Black UK counselling psychologists elucidates the intricate dynamics interwoven with social power structures and institutional frameworks. The study identified five distinct discourses mobilised by participants when discussing the interplay between their racial and professional identities in professional relationships.

The central aim of this analysis was to explore how these identities are constructed and experienced through social behaviours and attitudes, and the implications that follow. A central theme emerged around the notion of a 'technology of the self', as articulated by Foucault (1988), allowing individuals to effect changes in their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and identities to attain congruence and well-being. The coexistence of power and self-technologies highlights the complexities influencing participants' actions in their professional relationships.

The narratives revealed that identity construction extends beyond the individual, emphasising relationships ranging from self-awareness to interactions in and outside the field of psychology. This interconnectedness provided contrasting narratives through which participants articulated their racial and professional identities. The importance of self-awareness and knowledge emerged as not only an ethical obligation but also a vital practice guiding the moral and social conduct of participants as counselling psychologists. This

emphasis on self-understanding contributed to a cohesive identity, forming a basis for both resisting and reinforcing dominant professional discourses.

The findings highlight the need for systemic reforms to foster inclusivity and support in counselling psychology. Institutional structures in the NHS and broader professional landscapes perpetuate exclusionary practices that inhibit the recognition and legitimacy of Black counselling psychologists. Consequently, strategies to enhance diversity and inclusion must address deeper systemic issues rather than remain superficial.

This study establishes that Black counselling psychologists actively engage in identity construction, reflecting their unique experiences and contributions in the profession. Their narratives highlight the complexities of professional identity formation and call for a committed response from institutions to genuinely embrace inclusivity and advocate for meaningful change. By fostering environments that value diverse skills and identities, counselling psychology can progress toward a more equitable future, allowing Black psychologists to flourish personally and professionally.

Future research should explore whether all counselling psychologists feel this urgency for self-attentiveness and how these dynamics manifest across different contexts and backgrounds, contributing to a deeper understanding of professional identity in a racially diverse field. However, this research also underscores that individual strategies of self-awareness and adaptation cannot be separated from the broader structures of power in which they occur. Without addressing the dominant narratives and systemic inequalities embedded in the profession, efforts to diversify counselling psychology risk remaining at the surface level. A more equitable and inclusive future will require institutions to critically examine their own practices, curricula and recruitment processes to ensure they are not unconsciously reproducing exclusionary norms. In doing so, the profession can move from representation to transformation, centring justice, authenticity and the lived experiences of marginalised voices.

The Research Question

This research contributes to the understanding of how Black British counselling psychologists talk about their racial and professional identities, particularly in their professional relationships. By analysing these constructions, the study offers insights into an under-researched group in the UK literature on counselling psychology.

The research aims to stimulate dialogue in the counselling psychology community regarding the discourses used when discussing identities and the barriers faced by Black and ethnic minority counselling psychologists. The discussion highlights how these individuals may be perceived based on their racial identity and intersecting factors such as gender, economic status and professional standing in academia and institutions such as the NHS.

Intersectionality plays a crucial role in shaping these experiences, as the overlapping identities of race, gender and socio-economic status create unique challenges and opportunities for Black psychologists. Understanding this intersectional perspective allows for a more nuanced analysis of how these identities interact and affect the professional journeys of the participants. Given the scarcity of studies exploring the experiences of Black counselling psychologists in the UK, this research is particularly valuable. However, while the findings provide a rich account of participants' discourse surrounding their identities, these views may not represent all Black counselling psychologists. Nonetheless, the findings are intended to serve as a foundation for future studies focusing on Black and ethnic minority psychologists and trainees.

Whether Black British counselling psychologists choose to embrace dual identities, as articulated by Du Bois (1903) in the concept of double consciousness, or draw on biculturalism (Valentine, 1971), they must navigate the unique complexities of their identities, including their professional identities. This ongoing negotiation, informed by personal experience and critical consciousness, underscores the necessity of maintaining this distinctiveness, ultimately enriching the counselling psychology profession and its approach to understanding complex identities.

Implications

The insights gained from understanding how Black British counselling psychologists articulate their racial and professional identities in professional relationships have significant implications for all counselling psychologists, the broader profession and its research and practice. These findings underscore the vital role of training institutions in exploring and supporting the identities of counselling psychologists, which consequently influences their clinical work and professional development.

These discussions suggest that training institutions may inadvertently pose challenges not only for Black trainees but also for those from other minority backgrounds, such as individuals of diverse economic status and sexuality,

especially considering the ongoing efforts of counselling psychology to promote social justice. At a minimum, institutions should prioritise developing research focused on counselling psychologists from these diverse backgrounds, aiming to understand their unique experiences and integrating these insights into training programmes where feasible.

This study raises critical questions about the identity of counselling psychologists in and outside the profession, particularly regarding their roles in environments like the NHS. Although many participants had experience of working in the NHS, they raised diverse concerns, from issues of race to challenges in articulating their professional identity as counselling psychologists in the organisation. Each participant demonstrated an awareness of the social context framing their professional identities, including their relative standing compared to clinical psychologists. This contextual awareness is fundamental to how counselling psychologists perceive themselves, engage in identity formation and fulfil their professional roles.

In light of these findings, the profession would benefit from actively promoting the role of counselling psychologists in mental health discourse. Training programmes should prepare trainees for the realities and limitations prevalent in work settings like the NHS. Establishing mentoring relationships with experienced minority counselling psychologists could facilitate smoother navigation for Black trainees through the professional pipeline. It is important that Black counselling psychologists engage in personal therapy to explore the complex dynamics of this discourse and the power imbalances that can arise in professional relationships. Such exploration should also include their evolving relationship with themselves, as this affects their interactions with clients and colleagues. The literature has extensively documented the challenges associated with developing a cohesive identity for psychologists from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds. Providing explicit support and training from educational institutions regarding these issues is essential. Such initiatives can help protect Black and ethnic minority psychologists from the burdens associated with their identities and experiences.

While this study offers practical recommendations, it also highlights deeper structural challenges in the field of counselling psychology. The underrepresentation of Black counselling psychologists is not simply an issue of access or individual barriers but reflects broader power structures and dominant narratives that continue to privilege Whiteness and Eurocentric models of therapy. These dominant discourses

create environments in which Black trainees and professionals must not only navigate exclusion but also contend with their legitimacy in the profession (Fernando, 2017).

To move towards genuine inclusivity, the profession must critically engage with these foundational power dynamics and rethink its approach to knowledge production. Diversity initiatives cannot be limited to recruitment alone; they must interrogate the very assumptions underlying training practices, therapeutic paradigms and institutional cultures. Recognising and valuing lived experiences and alternative ways of knowing is essential for moving beyond superficial diversity efforts and creating lasting change in the profession (Kang, 2015).

Taking care of Black and Minority Counselling Psychologists

The journey into the field of psychology carries significant weight in terms of commitment and responsibility. This weight may be compounded for individuals navigating issues of race, gender or economic status, impacting their development of an authentic sense of self and their professional interactions. Given the critical role that Black and minority psychologists play in mental health, it is important to engage them in meaningful conversations and incorporate their distinctive perspectives as practitioners, educators and researchers. Such engagement will not only enrich the therapeutic relationship but also contribute to the growth and evolution of the profession.

Actionable Recommendations for Practitioners and Institutions

Based on the findings of this research, several specific, actionable recommendations can be made for practitioners and institutions:

- **Cultural competence training**. Institutions should implement comprehensive training programmes focused on cultural competence to prepare counselling psychologists to navigate and engage effectively with diverse populations. Such training should address implicit biases, cultural humility and awareness of the social determinants of mental health.

- **Creating safe spaces**. Establish resources and support systems in training institutions and workplaces that provide safe spaces for discussing identity related issues. These spaces can facilitate open dialogue, reflection and peer support among counselling psychologists facing similar challenges.

- **Mentorship programmes**. Develop structured mentorship programmes pairing experienced minority counselling psychologists with trainees. These

programmes can offer guidance, support and strategies for successfully navigating the complexities of professional identity and career development.

- **Research on diverse experiences**. Institutions should prioritise research exploration into the experiences of counselling psychologists from various minority backgrounds, such as those defined by economic status or sexuality, to develop a more inclusive understanding of identity construction in the profession.

- **Integration of identity themes in training**. Incorporate discussions of identity, including the intersections of race and other identity factors, into the core curriculum of counselling psychology training programmes. This can provide a framework for trainees to engage with their identities and clients critically.

- **Policy advocacy**. Encourage counselling psychologists to take active roles in advocating for institutional policies that enhance diversity and inclusivity in the profession, ensuring that the voices and experiences of minority psychologists are represented in decision-making processes.

- **Impact assessment**. To ensure the effectiveness of these proposed initiatives, institutions should establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation. Regular assessments will allow for adjustments based on feedback from counselling psychologists and trainees, ensuring that the support provided meets the evolving needs of minority psychologists.

- **Cross-disciplinary collaboration**. Encourage collaboration between counselling psychology and other related disciplines to foster a comprehensive understanding of the diversity of identities and best practices for supporting minority professionals in various contexts.

Strengths of the Research

This research provides an in-depth exploration of how Black British counselling psychologists construct and talk about their racial and professional identities, offering valuable insights into how these identities are formed and navigated in professional relationships.

One significant strength of this study is its potential to stimulate debate and foster further research in the counselling psychology profession. By exploring the responsibilities constructed by participants as they discuss the interplay between their racial and professional identities, the study not only highlights pressing social and professional dynamics in the field but also sets the stage for future research and discourse in the profession.

As mentioned at the onset, most research on Black and ethnic minority psychologists has either focused on clinical psychology or has been conducted outside the UK. This research addresses this gap by shedding light on a group that has received minimal attention in UK counselling psychology literature. By focusing on this underrepresented population, the study lays the groundwork for further research in counselling psychology that addresses the diverse experiences of individuals who do not fit traditional representations of psychologists. The findings encourage Black and minority counselling psychologists to amplify the voices of marginalised individuals. By examining their motivations and actions, practitioners can more effectively advocate for representations that illuminate the experiences of the voiceless, thereby enriching the collective understanding. Building on prior studies on the experiences of minority trainees and professionals in psychology, this research contributes novel insights to the existing evidence base. Key original findings include participants' profound understanding of self and identity, which is an ongoing and intricate journey. These insights reveal that the relationships professionals cultivate are deeply connected to their self-awareness and appreciation, and their pursuit of careers that resonate with their core values. This heightened self-awareness also fosters resilience among participants, enabling them to navigate professional challenges. Grounded in their experiences related to race and their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, their resilience highlights their capacity to overcome systemic barriers and contributes significantly to the richness of their narratives as Black counselling psychologists.

In summary, this research offers essential perspectives that advocate for a more inclusive understanding of identity in the profession. It underscores the need for ongoing exploration and dialogue in the field, reinforcing the study's call to action and its potential to shape the future of the profession.

Further Research

To enhance the validity of the current study, it is recommended that this research be replicated with a larger sample of UK Black counselling psychologists. Expanding the sample size will strengthen the findings and provide deeper insights into the discourses mobilised by this group. Additionally, employing different methodologies, such as focus groups, could elicit discourses less influenced by researcher prompts, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how Black counselling psychologists articulate these constructs and their significance in professional relationships. Introducing a larger number of male participants in future studies would significantly enhance our

understanding of the role of gender in shaping the discourses around these identities. An analysis of this data could reveal gender-specific nuances and may highlight discourses that have yet to be explored, creating opportunities for comparative studies. While this research has uncovered intriguing findings related to counselling psychology, further investigation into the intersection of professional identity and structural power relations in the field is warranted. Understanding how these power dynamics influence counselling psychologists, irrespective of race, could lead to valuable insights (Goodbody & Burns, 2011). Additionally, future studies could include other marginalised groups, such as individuals with disabilities or those identifying as part of the LGBTQ+ community, to enhance representation in the profession. Research focused on these populations would amplify their voices and experiences, contributing to the broader discourse in counselling psychology.

Further research into the trajectories of marginalised counselling psychologists, alongside exploring the types of organisations they navigate, would significantly enhance our understanding of their experiences. This pursuit can lead to insights that inform future training and policy and strengthen the overall landscape of counselling psychology. Bridging interdisciplinary collaborations, conducting longitudinal studies and actively engaging with organisations will enrich the discourse, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and effective practice in the field.

Limitations

While the findings of this study were constructed collaboratively by the participants and me, several measures were taken to ensure their sincerity. For instance, I documented my reflective statements throughout the process, which helped maintain transparency and openness in the research. My epistemological position was explicitly outlined and included direct quotes from each participant in the analysis chapter. However, I recognise that biases may still be inherent in this research, which could affect the interpretation of the findings. Therefore, I recommend further investigation to explore these biases and engage in ongoing debate regarding the conclusions drawn.

Additionally, the study included only one male participant, which was insufficient for providing insight into the potential role of gender. I also observed that many discourses appeared strikingly similar. If this study were to be replicated, it might be beneficial to adapt the wording of the interview questions to encourage more extensive discussion and capture diverse perspectives more effectively. Overall, these reflections and recommendations underscore the

importance of continual exploration and dialogue in this field of counselling psychology.

Final Reflections

Throughout this research, I have felt a profound responsibility to do justice to both the study and its participants. That responsibility has concerned honouring participants' voices and holding myself to account. From the outset, I sought answers, yet the inquiry evolved at every stage. I still grapple with whether I have found what I sought. The object of my search was never static nor reducible to a single aim. Inevitably, my exploration has also concerned my own identity, with its layered and evolving intricacies. At times I recognised echoes of my own experiences in my participants' narratives. Their reflections illuminated lingering thoughts and questions for me. This connection, however, also challenged my efforts to maintain a critical distance. Participants' discourses led me into uncharted territory that was, at times, daunting. In striving to represent the full spectrum of my participants' voices, I inadvertently captured aspects of my trajectory, which affirmed my place in the field. Although their experiences did not always mirror mine, their words remain with me and clarified previously obscured aspects of my experience.

I recognise that I cannot fully separate myself from the research process. I have therefore stayed attuned to my responses by keeping a reflective diary and engaging in regular conversations with those who share this journey and with individuals outside this experience. These dialogues have been invaluable in helping me acknowledge and reflect on my experiences as a Black woman, often in spaces that felt isolating. These conversations and my reflective practice have deepened my understanding of my worthiness and fostered a sense of gratitude.

Listening to participants' accounts also recalled experiences from before and during training. Their stories encouraged me to embrace my own narrative and acknowledge my growth as both a trainee and a future qualified Black female counselling psychologist. This mutual exchange underscored the importance of diverse voices and experiences in counselling psychology.

Looking ahead, I will integrate the lessons learned from this study into my practice. I intend to advocate for representation and inclusivity in the profession, ensuring that marginalised individuals' voices are heard and respected. More broadly, I recognise how my journey intersects with societal questions of race, identity, and representation in psychology. This awareness commits me to engage not only with my own narrative but also with the systemic barriers that

affect minoritised psychologists. By bringing these conversations into the open, I aim to contribute to a profession that values and integrates diverse experiences and actively works to dismantle structural barriers, enriching the practice of counselling psychology.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Classifications

Black

As much of our present is representative of a historical past, events such as European colonisation have an impact on what Fanon (1967) described as "one of the enduring legacies bequeathed to 'natives' by their colonial masters, proposing that Black people and their experiences would never be separated from their histories as recipients of Black colonisation (Watson, 2004), where ideologies that maintained the division between the coloniser and the colonised, such as 'colour,' generate political categories, impose social parameters that eliminate the complexities of within-group differences, and shape the 'us' and 'them' experiences (Dalal, 1993; Odusany, 2016).

Ethnicity

Arguably complex and controversial, it has been labelled subjective, multi-faceted, and something that changes in nature (Mateos, 2014). Partly built on the idea of race, ethnicity's affiliation with grouping people who appear to be the same leads to its interchangeable use with 'culture' (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993).

Culture

This is a conceptually difficult definition to capture (Fernando, 2002, 2012). Triandis et al.'s (1980) reformulation of Herskovits's conceptualisation of culture includes two dimensions: objective and subjective, in which beliefs, values, family roles, and religion are noted (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). With its dynamic and constantly changing nature, culture is usually measured against what is considered the 'norm'— Whiteness—further denigrating others while not recognising that 'White' is also a colour and a culture (Odusanya, 2016).

Appendix B: Poster

Counselling psychologist needed!

O   Are you a Counselling Psychologist who identifies as, Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African or Black other?

O   Have you been working as a charted counselling psychologist for a minimum of a year.

O   Are you a registered Counselling Psychologist, who has completed the BPS/HPCP accreditation?

O   No Age or gender *restrictions*

I am a student at the London Metropolitan University, currently studying towards a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. I am hoping to do this piece of research as my doctoral thesis. Looking at, how 'Black' Counselling Psychologists construct and talk about the interplay of their, 'racial' and 'professional' identity, within the context of professional relationships?

Participation will involve an informal one-to-one interview, which will last approximately an hour to an hour and a half. At a l location that is convenient for you. All interviews will be confidential and your identity will be protected at all times during the research.

For more information, please contact myself, Maxine Robinson (Trainee Counselling Psychologist) on:
Email.

Tel:

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from the London Metropolitan University Research Ethics board

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

To whom it may concern,

I am a trainee counselling psychologist at London Metropolitan University and am currently researching to understand more about how Black British counselling psychologists construct and talk about their racial and professional identities within the context of professional relationships.

Very limited research has been conducted in this area, and far less has explored the UK context. I hope that by carrying out this research, we will be able to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Black counselling psychologists and develop deeper knowledge about identities and professional relationships.

I am writing in the hope that you will be interested in helping me in this endeavour by sharing your experiences in an interview. The interview will last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded. Data from your interview will be used for my doctoral-level counselling psychology project.

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any point up until June 2020, without question. Interviews will be audio-recorded and kept strictly confidential. All recordings will be stored securely and destroyed once the project is completed.

Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand the interview may evoke some difficult feelings. You will have the opportunity to discuss any feelings that arise after the interview with me, and you will be provided with information on sources of support should you wish to access them. Please take your time in deciding whether you would like to take part.

Thank you very much for your time. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at: or email at:

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

Maxine Robinson

Appendix D: Interview Schedule One

Opening Questions

• Can you tell me how long you've been a registered counselling psychologist (CoP)?

• Can you tell me the type of environment you work in at present?

      o *Prompt: NHS, secondary, charity*

• Do you work with other CoPs? If not, are they clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, etc.?

• Can you tell me a bit about why you decided to be a CoP?

Sequencing of questions – less probing, sensitive, and direct/funnelling down questions

1. How would you describe your professional identity?

2. Can you tell me about any training experiences you feel have impacted your identity as a CoP?

3. What has been your experience of developing a professional identity since registration?

4. How would you describe yourself?

5. Has your personal identity played any part in the construction of your professional identity?

6. Do you feel your ethnicity, your race, has played a role in the development of your professional identity?

7. Do you see your race, or ethnicity, as part of your professional identity o If so, can you tell me how? o If not, can you tell me why? o Has it ever been part of your professional identity?

      o Do you feel your professional relationships see you as a Black CoP?

8. Has your race ever informed your attitude toward your professional identity?

9. Can you tell me about any personal experiences that you feel may have had an impact on your identity as a Black CoP?

10. What has been your experience of skin colour in your work as a CoP in professional relationships?

11. Can you tell me about any professional relationships that you feel may have impacted your identity as a Black CoP?

12. Where do you position yourself as a Black CoP and in relation to the perception of skin colour?

Ending Questions

• Have you got anything else that you would like to add?

• How did you find the interview?

• Do you have questions you would like to ask me?

Appendix E: Interview Schedule Two

Opening Questions

- Can you tell me how long you've been a registered counselling psychologist (CoP)?

- Can you tell me what type of environment you currently work in (e.g., NHS, secondary care, charity)?

- Do you work with other CoPs? If not, are they clinical psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, etc.?

- Can you tell me a bit about why you decided to become a CoP?

Inform the participant that you are going to ask some questions about identity.

Main Questions

1. First of all, could you tell me what you consider your personal identity to be? Could you describe it to me?

2. Do you think your personal identity is related to your ethnicity? If so, how? Why?

3. Now moving on to your professional identity: How would you describe it?

4. Can you tell me about any training experiences that you feel have impacted your professional identity?

5. What has been your experience of developing a professional identity since registration?

6. Has your personal identity played a role in the development of your professional identity?

7. Do you feel your ethnicity or race has played a role in the development of your professional identity?

8. Some people talk of their identity using words such as race, ethnicity, heritage, or background.

   o Do you see your race or ethnicity as part of your professional identity? o

      If yes, can you tell me how? o   If no, can you tell me why?   o

Has it ever been part of your professional identity? ○   Do you feel

your professional relationships see you as a Black CoP?

- ○   Do you feel you had any agency over this?

9. Has your race ever informed your attitude toward your professional identity? ○   If

so, how? With whom?

10. Can you tell me about any personal experiences that you feel may have had an impact on your identity as a Black CoP?

11. What has been your experience of skin colour in your work as a CoP in professional relationships?

12. Can you tell me about any professional relationships that you feel may have impacted your identity as a Black CoP?

13. Can you tell me of any experiences or behaviours in your work life that you think may have affected your professional and personal identity?

Ending Questions

•   Have you got anything else that you would like to add?

•   How did you find the interview?

•   Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet

Research Project:

How do Black UK counselling psychologists construct and talk about their racial and professional identities in professional relationships?

Dear volunteer,

You are invited to take part in a study exploring how Black British counselling psychologists talk about the interplay of their racial and professional identities within professional relationships. I am particularly interested in your experience of being a Black counselling psychologist, the relationship between your race (i.e., how others categorise the colour of your skin) and your professional identity, the factors that have contributed to or impeded this interplay within professional relationships, and how you have managed these dynamics. I am also interested in any factors you have found influential in your personal and professional development.

I am a student at London Metropolitan University, studying towards a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. This research forms part of my doctoral thesis.

Eligibility

For this study, I am looking for counselling psychologists who:

- Identify as Black British, Black Caribbean, Black African, or another Black identity;

- Have completed BPS accreditation and are registered with the HCPC, and have been working as a chartered Counselling Psychologist for a minimum of one year;

- Are ideally working within an organisation alongside other counselling psychologists/therapists.

What participation involves

If you choose to participate, you will be invited to a one-to-one, in-depth interview about different aspects of being a Black counselling psychologist. The interview will last approximately one hour. If you decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason up until June 2022. If you find any questions difficult or intrusive, you do not have to answer them, and there will be no pressure to do so.

Audio-recording and confidentiality

The interview will be audio-recorded to enable accurate analysis. Recordings will be stored securely at the researcher's premises. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and any identifying information will be removed and will not be quoted in the study. Consent forms will be kept separately from the data and used only to verify that informed consent was obtained. The name of your workplace/school will not be mentioned.

Please note: confidentiality may be limited in rare circumstances, for example, if information indicates a risk of harm to you or someone else, or a legal/ safeguarding obligation arises.

Voluntary participation and status

Whether you choose to take part is entirely your decision. Participation or nonparticipation will have no bearing on your status as a counselling psychologist in any way.

Access and publication

My Director of Studies/supervisor and/or the external examiner may request access to anonymised raw data for verification purposes. I intend to submit the completed study for publication; accordingly, data may be retained for a defined period after write-up in line with university policy and ethical guidelines.

Results

Participants are welcome to request a copy of the final study after project completion. The report will be available in May 2022.

Ethical approval

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Panel at London Metropolitan University and will be conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's ethical guidelines.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this study, please contact me by phone or email. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Catherine Athanasiadou-Lewis.

Email:
Phone:

Thank you very much for your time and interest.
If you are interested in taking part, please contact me by phone or email.

Kind regards,

Maxine Robinson

Email:

Phone:

Appendix G: Consent Form

Study Title: Power, Identity, and Social Positioning in the Professional Lives of Black Counselling Psychologists: A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

Researcher: Maxine Robinson

1. I confirm that I have read and fully understood the participant information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. [Participant Initials: _____]

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and without my professional status being affected in any way.
   [Participant Initials: _____]

3. I agree to take part in the above study.
   [Participant Initials: _____]

Participant

Name   Date   Signature

Researcher

Name   Date   Signature

Appendix H: Debriefing Form

Dear Participant,

Thank you very much for taking part in this study. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated. The information obtained in this interview will be transcribed and analysed and will contribute to the researcher's doctoral research project.

As stated in the information sheet and consent form, all information provided will remain confidential. All interview audio recordings will be saved on an encrypted device, and all transcription and identifying information will be anonymised.

If you have any questions or concerns during or following the completion of the interview, or if you wish to withdraw your participation from the study up until 20th June 2020, please do not hesitate to contact me:

Researcher
Maxine Robinson
Email:
Phone:

Supervisor
Dr Catherine Athanasiadou-Lewis
Email:
Phone:

As mentioned before, you may request a copy of the completed study. This will be available in May 2022. Please indicate your interest at the time of the interview or email me at the above address.

Helplines and Support

- The Samaritans: A national helpline, open 24 hours a day. Tel: 0845 90 90 90 (UK).

- Mind: A national organisation with local branches across the UK. Provides individual counselling sessions for a small fee and operates helplines Monday–Friday, 9:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Tel: 0300 123 3393.

- The British Psychological Society (BPS): Provides a directory of chartered psychologists. Tel: 0116 254 9568; Website: www.bps.org.uk.

Thank you again.

Kind regards,   Maxine Robinson

Appendix I: Transcript Example

	Mhm.	
	And because they're woman, or because they're black men.	517
	Mhm.	518
	Um, it very much, it, it differs in where you are.	519
INT	Mm.	520
RES	Um, what my point is, I, I have a, a mixed heritage. So	521
INT	when people see me, they see me as black but actually,	522
RES	I'm saying that I am more than that. So I, I am more than	523
INT	a, an identity that's bestowed on me. Um, I don't have… I	524
RES	don't have a, a box of identity, um, that is mine. I, I live and	525
	breathe many other identities that isn't necessarily mine	526
	but I have assimilated and I have collected over the	527
	years, where there is, you know, my ancestry. 528	529
	That's very important to me. Um, I'm spiritual, that's very important to me. So that's an identity that I have. 530	531
	Mhm.	
INT	Um, and so it's sort of… there's, there's a mixture of things. I'm not one 532 thing. 533	
RES		
	You're not one thing?	534
INT	No.	535
RES	So um, if we think about, um, being black, what does that mean for	
INT	536 you? 537	
	I think for me, being black is different.	538
RES	Okay.	539
INT	Um, being black is strong.	540
RES	Okay.	541
INT	Um, being black is…	542
RES	What do you mean, what do you mean by strong?	543
INT	Resilience as, as people. Um, I think that black is strong.	544
RES	Is that something, do you think, that we have to have or have to	
INT	be 545 like? 546 No. No. 547	
RES	Or something that we…	548
INT		

Appendix J: Transcript from NVivo

Appendix K: Initial Coding

Appendix L: Flowchart Structure for Literature Search

Define Keywords

• Original Keywords:

  o "counsel(l)ing psychology and Black / minority" o

  "psychology identity, Black, minority" o

  "counsel(l)ing / clinical / psychology, identity / Black /

  ethnicity / BAME / minority, professional, professional

  identity"

• Additional Keywords to Consider:

  o "cultural identity" o   "racial identity" o   "ethnic minority

  mental health" o "microaggressions" o "intersectionality in professional

  identity" o

  "racialised experiences in counseling"

Conducted Searches

• Database Searches: o EBSCOhost o Google Scholar o

  ResearchGate o PsycINFO o PubMed o Web of

  Science

• Library/Organisational Searches:

  o London Metropolitan University Library o British Library

  o BPS reports o Other relevant reports

Use Snowball Technique

 • Reference sections of:

  o Dissertations (published and unpublished) o

   Relevant papers found in searches

Expand Search with Additional Keywords

- Feminism

- Discrimination

- Foucault

- Power

- Personal experiences

- Minority professionals

- Professional minorities

- Trainees / Minority trainees

- People of colour (or color) • Identity trainees

Further Considerations

- Social justice in psychology

- Ethnic diversity in the mental health profession

Review Collected Materials

- Analyse the literature gathered from searches

- Identify gaps in the research relevant to the study

- Conclude the literature search process

- Summarise findings and formulate research questions based on the literature review.