

2<sup>ND</sup> EDITION

# A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO THERAPEUTIC COUNSELLING

KELLY BUDD,  
TRACI POSTINGS & HEATHER PRICE



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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## KELLY BUDD

Kelly is an experienced person-centred counsellor, supervisor, and tutor. She has worked at CPCAB, the UK's only awarding organisation specialising in counselling and psychotherapy, since 2017. In her role as Chief Professional Standards Officer she oversees the valuable work of the qualification service to maintain the standards and relevance of CPCAB qualifications. Prior to this she spent many years working in substance misuse agency settings and also private practice work. She is passionate about high quality counselling education and championing the importance of human connection in training. She is an advocate for inclusive vocational training pathways towards becoming a counsellor and enabling students to flourish and gain self-understanding through their training. She has a particular interest in supporting practitioners taking their first steps into the field of counselling and found her years teaching diploma programmes hugely inspirational.

## TRACI POSTINGS

Traci is an experienced counsellor and supervisor and has taught extensively in a range of settings. She has been a training consultant in the homelessness and addiction sectors. Traci worked for CPCAB for over a decade, focusing on training standards and qualification development. More recently, Traci has been involved in competence framework development for the profession, being committed to promoting and achieving high standards in counselling.

Traci strongly believes that recovery and healing should be available to all who need and want it.

## HEATHER PRICE

Heather is a very experienced counselling tutor, having delivered CBCAB qualifications at Levels 2, 3, and 4 in a College of Further Education. Later, her role at CPCAB Head Office included managing Levels 4–6, and supporting centres to produce their own tailor-made qualifications. She continues to internally verify coursework from the latter, and externally verifies other centres that run regulated counselling qualifications. Her area of interest

is in loss and bereavement and she worked for 25 years as a counsellor, supervisor, and trainer with Cruse Bereavement Care. Heather continues to moderate supervision portfolios for Cruse, and runs her own small private practice for counselling, supervision, and consultancy.

# 3

## DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY

In counselling it is imperative that we understand and work with diversity. There are many strands to understanding what this simple sentence means. It might be in relation to acknowledging, reflecting on, and working with the diversity issues between the counsellor and client during the counselling work. It is also about demonstrating sensitivity to diversity issues with individual clients.

In order to work helpfully and appropriately with diversity, counsellors need to challenge their own issues, fears, and prejudices; explore and challenge their own beliefs and values, be able to critically reflect on how they impact on and influence the client, the counselling relationship, and the work.

The relationship between empathy and diversity needs to be explored and understood in order to enable the counsellor to move past any blocks to communicating empathic understanding and acceptance.

**Q** This whole subject really scares me.

**A** Scares?

**Q** Yes, I'm scared of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing or using the wrong words or being prejudiced without realising it or offending the client, or even worse causing harm to the client or colluding with the client or rescuing the client or not understanding the client or...

**A** Many fears. Fear and diversity have a powerful dynamic. It could be said that this is the subject that separates the men from the boys. Or should I say, separates the men and women from the girls and boys. Or the women and men from the girls and boys, or even the adults from the children. Or perhaps it would be better to say it separates people from people.

**Q** It sounds as if you are making light of some really important gender issues.

**A** Yes, I understand why you think that to be the case but I am trying to make a very important point. There is one word in each of those is that is important and that word is 'separates'. Diversity can separate people from people. Without understanding and self-awareness, diversity separates. It can create an 'us and them' scenario and instead of coming together to be curious and interested in each other, our differences and similarities, we can become defensive and judgemental, fearing differences that we aren't familiar with.

Before we can work with diversity, we need further knowledge to understand our reactions and responses to difference and diversity. We need to build understanding around our own beliefs and judgements, which can be deeply entrenched and out of our awareness.

In the previous chapter, the focus was on the counselling relationship, the therapeutic dyad. This chapter is also about relationship, our relationship with diversity. We need to work towards a relationship with diversity that is genuinely interested in learning about others, that is curious and open-minded; able to move past our own unfounded and ungrounded fears towards acceptance and understanding, both of ourselves and others.

**Q** We are taught that we need to be non-judgemental with every client and strive for equality, to leave our prejudices and assumptions out of the room. Now you are saying we need to learn more about our prejudices, beliefs, and values.

**A** There is a big difference between equality and sameness. I often hear trainees say that they treat all clients the same and this is a huge assumption that all people have the same needs. Also, the word judgement suggests allocation of value, e.g. good/bad. We work hard not to judge but we do consider the differences and similarities between us, which will allow us to empathise rather than assume or sympathise.

We aim to equally value all of our clients and to do that we need to notice their uniqueness, their difference and sameness. We need to be interested and curious about who we are with; and we work hard to get to know them through a clear lens, unhindered by our own opinions, values, and beliefs.

**Q** I used to think that just having good intentions would be enough. As long as I meant well, I thought I would do well. Now I can see there's a much bigger picture and how easily I could misunderstand or even hurt someone through lack of self-awareness and just plain ignorance.

**A** We are works in progress. We can never be perfect. Progress not perfection is good enough for today.



However, we are already talking about working with clients and there is a step before that. We can only work with people who are able to access counselling. Therefore, we need to consider *inclusion*.

What do you understand inclusion to mean?

- Q** It means to be included, to be a part of something. In relation to counselling, I guess it means being able to access counselling.
- A** Yes, you are right. As counsellors we need to think carefully about how we offer an inclusive practice. How we can support people to access counselling that meets their unique needs. How we make counselling accessible for those for whom accessibility might be a barrier. How we widen participation and work towards making counselling available to all who need and want it.
- Q** Would things like wheelchair ramps and fees on a sliding scale be helpful?
- A** That is a little simplistic but a start. It's worth thinking about how a counselling agency might consider inclusivity.

### Activity 3.1

Imagine you are the manager of a counselling agency. How could you ensure that your service meets the needs of a diverse population?

You receive requests for counselling from the following people.

If your agency could provide counselling, what would you say and do?

If your agency couldn't provide counselling, what would you say and do?

- A Black gay man who had felt judged by a previous counsellor.
- Someone with agoraphobia who does not own a computer.
- Someone who does not speak English.
- A deaf person.
- Someone who wants a counsellor who has the same religion as them.
- A recovering addict who is HIV positive.
- A nine-year-old child who has been sexually abused.
- Someone who will only see a trans counsellor.
- A couple separating.
- Someone who is severely physically disabled and non-verbal.

(Continued)

#### Things to consider

- The setting – in person or virtual
- The counsellor
- The counselling approach
- Cost.

**Q** Is it possible for any one counselling agency to meet all needs?

**A** It would be very unlikely. However, if an agency or counsellor is not able to meet a client's needs, they do need to try and refer to an appropriate service. There are many agencies that offer a service for specific issues and groups. There are also agencies which specialise in online and phone therapy. Since the pandemic of 2020, there has been a huge growth in virtual counselling, which allows clients access to services many miles or even countries away.

**Q** Online or phone counselling isn't for everyone though.

**A** Absolutely, just as in-person counselling isn't for everyone.

**Q** Also, if I was working in private practice, I may not get to work with such a wide range of clients as an agency does. I am on placement in a low-cost agency. Most of the clients who come have too little money to be able to pay for counselling, and those who can pay can only pay a very small amount. If I were in private practice, I couldn't afford to do that.

**A** You make a very important point. There is a big divide in society around who can afford to access counselling, and who can't. This is another area of difference – if we have too little money to pay for counselling, then we have to be reliant on what, if anything, we can access through low-cost/free agencies and the NHS. We therefore have less choice concerning how long we stay in counselling, who our counsellor will be, and what kind of therapy we can access.

### Reflection 3.1

Diversity and inclusion expert Vernā Myers is quoted as saying:

*Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.*

What does this statement mean to you?

What is the difference between inclusion and diversity?

Recall a time when you have felt excluded. How did you feel?

- A** Inclusion is ensuring people can access counselling. From then on, the counselling needs to meet the clients' diverse needs, and the counsellor needs to be competent to work safely and effectively with both differences and similarities.

As we have already acknowledged, in order to be inclusive, we also need to be self-aware. Being aware of our prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions is very different to acting on them. In fact, only by being aware of them can we not act on them. Once we are aware, we can work to understand them; their origins, their validity, and the risks to our clients of believing and acting on them.

- Q** That all makes sense, but what would I do if a client was, for example, racist or homophobic? I don't know if I could empathise or have unconditional positive regard. As a counsellor, is it even my business what prejudices a client has?

- A** Good question, and yes this is something as counsellors we may have to do and have to manage, and in some instances challenge or at least understand. And yes, it's really difficult. How can we stay empathic but also true to ourselves? When is it appropriate to speak out and when not? These are important but difficult questions. And it's important to remember this works every which way – if you are not from the dominant white culture, how does it feel to work as a therapist with someone who is? And as a therapist what might it feel like to be rejected because your client sees you as different from them, and not in a way that is positive – so it's important to remember that this is not just about a counsellor's attitude to difference, it's also how counsellors respond to their clients' attitudes to diversity issues. There's more on this later in the chapter.

To start, if you had to work with someone whose opinions and values were different from yours, how would you feel?

- Q** I think I would feel really uncomfortable and maybe even irritated and judgemental. What would be the right thing to do?

- A** I would take it to supervision, definitely. I would suggest working hard to not let your feelings get in the way of the work.

- Q** Would it be ok to say that I had a different opinion?

- A** I guess sometimes is the answer.

- Q** Sometimes is always the answer.

- A** Sometimes is sometimes the answer!

It would depend on the relationship you have with the client and also how long you have been working together, and many other factors. It is important we remain curious and a response could be along the lines of, 'It's interesting, we have different opinions and viewpoints on that. I'd really like to hear more about what leads you to feel that way'.

### Reflection 3.2

Consider the following statements and whether you agree with them, both in relation to your personal life and in relation to your role as a counsellor:

I challenge discrimination whenever I encounter it.

I think racists are disgusting people.

I have worked through all my prejudices and stereotypes.

I judge everyone and everything.

Are your responses the same for your personal life and counselling role? If they are different, reflect on why.

- A** When training to be counsellors, we learn to be aware of personal prejudices and the importance of not making assumptions about clients, but it is also vital to consider how society as a whole can discriminate and how that can become an integral part of the therapeutic journey.

### Exercise 3.1

Read through the following list of people with different life circumstances:

Teacher

Homeless person

Sex worker

Nurse

Heroin addict

Someone with a learning disability

Single parent with six children

Someone receiving benefits

Doctor.

- 1 List those individuals in the order of importance or status that you think *society* would put them in.
- 2 List those individuals in the order of importance or status that *you* would put them in.
- 3 Go through the list again, considering whether the order would change if the person's gender or race were different.
- 4 Where would you put yourself?
- 5 How would the order change if we add the following additional factors to the people on the list?

Teacher – convicted of child abuse

Homeless person – had to flee a violent relationship

Sex worker – victim of child trafficking

Nurse – arrested for stealing patients' belongings

Heroin addict – works as a leading heart surgeon

Someone with a learning disability – is a poet laureate

Single parent with six children – is a Hollywood star

Someone receiving benefits – has terminal cancer

Doctor – who performs female genital mutilation surgery.

Add other factors and be aware of how your feelings and reactions change, and how you feel society would change its view of the individuals concerned.

**Q** That really made me think. My mind seemed to jump to conclusions and form an opinion immediately. I felt shocked by my judgements when additional factors were added.

**A** We so often make judgements without knowing the full story. It's important to remember that we don't have to rely on those first almost automatic thoughts, judgements, and opinions we form. We can learn how to move away from reacting and move towards responding. When we find ourselves making those snap judgements, we can pause, and take time to consider what we are basing the judgement on. We can check for accuracy and fairness; and we can go on to challenge and move past our outdated prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions.

**Q** It's helpful to think that my automatic judgements are trying to keep me safe and that I'm not an awful person for having those thoughts. It makes me feel better about myself but also highlights even more the importance of continually building self-awareness and critically evaluating my own responses and reactions.

**A** Another aspect of self-awareness is our beliefs and values and where they originate from. For many of us, one of the earliest messages is, 'Don't talk to strangers'. This message tells us that strangers are dangerous. Now, as counsellors, we sit and talk with strangers.

**Q** I hadn't thought of that. Maybe that's why I get so nervous meeting new clients?

**A** It certainly could be part of the reason. We will have many other beliefs and values that we have accrued throughout our life. Some may still be relevant and helpful; others need to be made redundant and are no longer appropriate or relevant.

### Activity 3.2

Being aware of our personal values and beliefs helps develop self-awareness. Insight into how we could, when unaware, influence and/or lead clients, helps us to maintain the focus on the clients' agenda and needs.

This activity is to build awareness of your values and beliefs.

- List your personal values
- List your professional values
- List your personal beliefs
- List your professional beliefs.

It is helpful to consider where your current and historical beliefs and values came from.

- Family
- Upbringing
- Friends
- Media.

Think about each of your values and beliefs and whether they are still valid and why?

Which values and beliefs have you outgrown?

Which values and beliefs do you want to keep?

**Q** I used to be very opinionated and judgemental, and to be honest, there are times I still can be. If I'm feeling stressed or not good about myself, my old judgemental self can appear. The main difference is that now I can challenge my judgements, rather than just believing them. There are still some people I judge though and I'm not sure how I'd feel if I had a client who belonged to a group I still judge.

- A** What groups are you referring to?
- Q** Well, I'd find it hard to work with someone who had abused a child. I would also find it hard not to judge someone who had been unfaithful in a relationship. This sounds like quite a minor thing but it is something that happened to me and hurt very much and I'm worried that my own feelings would cause me to judge.
- A** This is where good supervision and good personal therapy are essential. It's also why it's important to have the classroom environment to support you in the early days of working with clients. Having as much support as possible is essential. All counsellors will encounter clients they find difficult to warm to and understand. Clients who remind us of painful and difficult people and situations. Clients we may find irritating or even boring. It's how we respond to these clients that's important.
- Q** Is it ok to feel irritated with a client?
- A** Of course it is, we are only human. What's important is what we do with our irritation and how we ensure we do not act it out with the client.

### Reflection 3.3

You are likely to face challenging situations as a counsellor. How would you respond to a client who said:

- I wasn't expecting a man / a woman / a Black person / someone in a wheelchair.
- You're very young, aren't you?
- You can't understand what it's like being....., unless you've experienced it.
- What religion are you?
- Immigrants are taking over the country.
- The bible is against homosexuality.
- Children need discipline for their own good. A good slap doesn't do any harm.

As you consider each statement, be aware of your own thoughts and feelings and whether you agree or disagree with them.

## POWER

Another way of thinking about the wider social picture can be around power; what it means to us individually and what it means in relation to society as a whole.

Thinking of the origin of the word may help us. It comes from Middle English: from Anglo-Norman French *poeir*, from an alteration of Latin *posse* ('be able').

**Q** Be able, I like that. So it means, if I am powerful, I am able to...?

**A** Yes, and without power, we are unable to...

We do of course know that some people have more power than others in society – those in senior positions, ‘positions of power’, perhaps those who are very wealthy. Colour and culture certainly have a strong relationship with the allocation of power in society. For some people, the path to senior positions and wealth is easier than it is for people from certain groups, especially minority groups. Therefore, for some, it is incredibly difficult to move towards a position of power, and often through no fault of their own.

**Q** Yes, I can see that but even those in positions of power have problems and difficulties and have judgements placed onto them.

**A** I absolutely agree.

**Q** Ok, but I’m not sure what this has to do with counselling?

**A** Thinking about The Power Threat Meaning Framework, may be helpful.

The Power Threat Meaning Framework issued by the British Psychological Society states:

The Power Threat Meaning Framework demonstrates that distress may be experienced by anyone, including those whose social status is more privileged. Everyone is impacted by the negative operation of power in one form or another, and no one is immune from social and relational adversities. Higher social status can bring exposure to its own characteristic negative operation of power. However, as a generalisation, some identities offer much greater compensatory power, status, control and access to social capital in the face of distress than others, along with more options for support, escape, protection, safety and healing. This is confirmed by the evidence about class, ‘race’ and gender gradients in mental health, criminal justice and other welfare systems. (Johnstone and Boyle, 2018: 47)

The Power Threat Meaning Framework can be very helpful for counsellors. It was designed by psychologists and former users of the mental health system. The framework encourages us to move away from medicalisation of pain and distress. To acknowledge that even the most overwhelming feelings and presentations of mental ill-health can be understood in the context of our social situation, culture, relationships etc. The framework rejects diagnostic categories and works to



understand someone within their own unique situation. The framework refers to 'mental distress' and 'emotional suffering' instead of 'illness' or 'disorder'.

**Q** I really like that way of thinking about distress but I'm struggling to see a clear link to power.

**A** The framework focuses on how power impacts our lives in a variety of different ways. It considers different areas of life where we have or do not have power. The areas include, among others, physical health, housing, employment, relationships, wealth, and culture.

**Q** So, in a way is it about whether or not we have choices in those areas or if we are forced by circumstance to be where we are, rather than where we would like to be?

**A** A great way of looking at it. Maybe you could do your own personal inventory of power, to see areas where you do have power and areas where it is lacking. Also, it is important to consider when and how our power could have been affected – by being in a marginalised group or by trauma, adverse childhood effects, bereavement, etc. A whole range of factors interplay and impact on our personal power, self-esteem, and identity. This interplay can help us as counselors really understand our clients and their distress. In addition, the framework offers a number of questions designed to change a client's narrative, helping to move away from 'There's something wrong with you' to 'something happened to you'.

The questions identified as helpful are:

What has happened to you? (Power)

How did it affect you? (Threat)

What sense did you make of it? (Meaning)

What did you have to do to survive?

Additional questions that help someone think about what skills and qualities they have and the totality of their experience are:

What are your strengths?

What is your story?

These questions can help someone understand their current situation, behaviour, and distress in a different way. They help re-frame self-defeating and self-blaming narratives. Often someone's distress and presentation is a 'normal response' to an 'abnormal' situation, rather than a personal or moral failing.

- Q** This feels very important. I think empathy is a valuable and essential quality within this framework. It moves away from blame towards understanding and acceptance.

### Reflection 3.4

In relation to power, where would you put yourself?

Where do you feel you have power in your life and where do you feel you don't?

Reflect on the two different experiences.

How can this learning and awareness enhance your counselling work?

- A** As counsellors thinking about equality and discrimination, the concept of intersectionality needs consideration. The term was first used in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw who provided the following definition of intersectionality: 'Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking' (p. 149).

The Meriam-Webster dictionary ([www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com)) offers the following definition:

The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

In simple terms, intersectionality refers to how some people are discriminated against for more than one characteristic. It acknowledges that people can be disadvantaged by multiple areas of oppression, e.g. race, class, age, gender identity, religion or lack of, age, sexual orientation, etc.

- Q** I had never thought that discrimination could be cumulative. If I try and apply it to myself, does it mean I can be prejudiced against someone for more than one reason? If I have prejudices around sexuality and gender and age, could they all come together to form a sort of super-prejudice?

- A** That is a very interesting view of intersectionality. To summarise, intersectionality is a means for understanding how different aspects of someone's identity combine and are subject to specific modes of discrimination and privilege. It identifies the advantages and disadvantages that people face within overlapping systems of oppression, discrimination and privilege.

For example:

A woman earns less than a man.

A Black woman earns less than a white woman who earns less than a man.

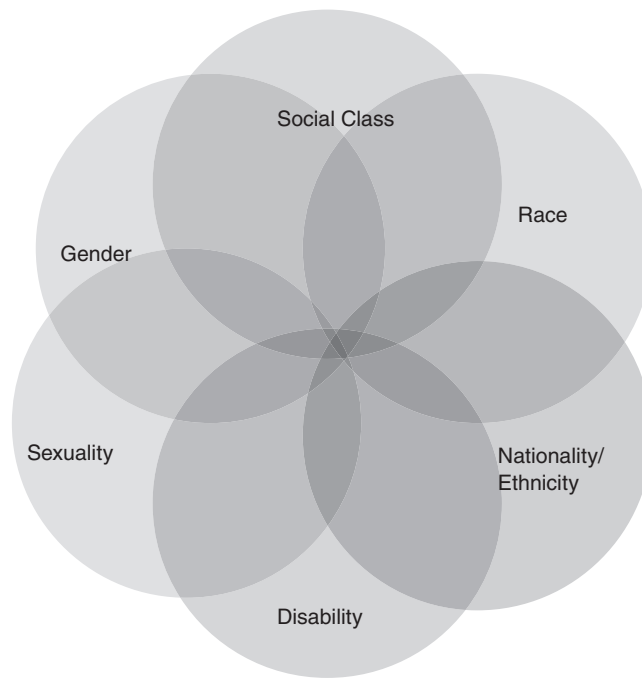
A trans Black woman earns less than a Black woman who earns less than a white woman who earns less than a man.

A man earns more than a woman.

A white man earns more than a Black man.

A neurotypical white man earns more than a neurodivergent white man who earns more than a neurodivergent Black man.

The examples could go on and on. Figure 3.1 is a helpful representation of intersectionality.



**Figure 3.1** Venn diagram of intersectionality

Source: <https://open.maricopa.edu/smallgroupcommunicationcollaborative/chapter/social-stratification-and-intersectionality/>. Created by Jakobi Oware; reproduced under CC BY-NC-SA.

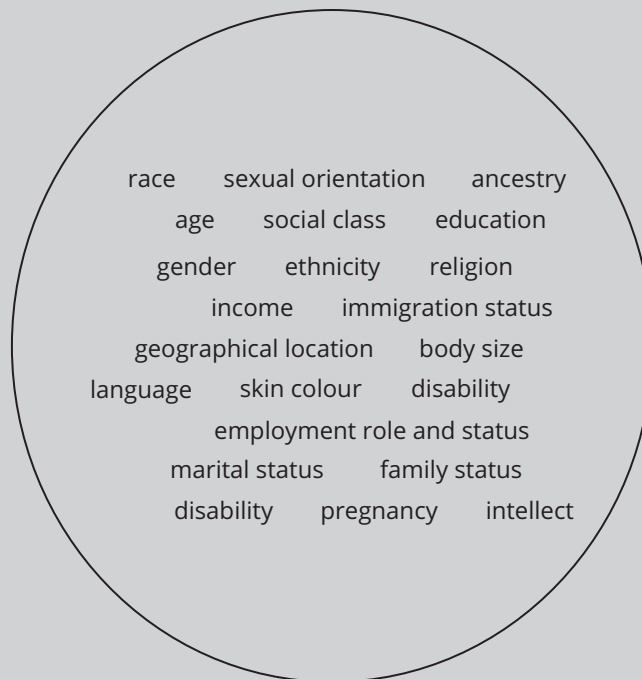
This is quite a simplistic diagram but shows that where there are multiple areas of potential discrimination, the impact on the person is greater.

- Q** Did you state that intersectionality can have advantages, as well as disadvantages?
- A** Yes, as can be seen in the examples above, a white male has two factors that afford privilege in this society – colour and gender.
- Q** I am a white, able-bodied, gay woman, so I have both advantages and disadvantages.
- A** The activity below will help you consider intersectionality further.

### Activity 3.3

Consider yourself in relation to the terms in the circle in Figure 3.2 and identify which are seen as advantages and which are seen as disadvantages in society.

How might your personal advantages/disadvantages impact on your opportunities in life? For example in relation to employment, education, etc.



**Figure 3.2** Societal advantages/disadvantages

**Q** That activity really made me think. My advantages certainly outweigh my disadvantages, which affirms my privilege in society.

**A** Can you use this learning to enhance your empathic understanding in your counseling work?

**Q** It has opened my eyes to how disadvantaged many people are in society, it's horrible.

**A** Empathy not sympathy is important. Understanding is key.

**Q** I feel overwhelmed by it all and not sure I have the skills and qualities needed.

**A** A helpful acronym is **CHOW**:

**C**uriosity

**H**onesty

**O**pen-mindedness

**W**illingness

**Q** What does that acronym mean to you?

**A** Curiosity for me means not thinking I know. Remaining open to learn who my client is and not assuming. It means being interested in their experience. Honesty is similar to congruence. I think it's important for me to be honest with myself and my supervisor about my prejudices and stereotypes and what's going on for me when I do make assumptions, especially when the client has had similar life experiences to me. Open-mindedness is similar to curiosity and honesty. If I am open-minded, I am able to see past my old beliefs and opinions and values. There's an old saying about not being able to graft new ideas onto a closed mind. As a counsellor I need to be able to have new ideas and new ways of thinking about things and people. Willingness means I am ready and able to do what is needed to meet the needs of my clients.

It might be helpful for you to consider what the acronym means for you and to reflect on where your strengths and challenges are.

**Q** What other skills and qualities do I need?

**A** It sounds as if you are asking for a prescriptive way of working with diversity. This is actually the opposite of what we are striving for. One size doesn't fit all... ever. Rather than looking for additional skills or techniques, we need to be working on self-awareness and personal and moral qualities. We are the 'tool of our trade' so to speak. We need to be continually working on maintaining our own wellbeing, insight, and awareness in relation to all clients.

**Q** Yes, I think I'm so worried about making mistakes and saying or doing the wrong thing, that I can end up too scared to say anything at all. I guess if I make mistakes, I can always apologise and talk it through with my client. By trying so hard to get it right, I risk losing being real and congruent.

**A** Absolutely. A goal that would be helpful to aim for would be *cultural competence*. This means continually developing your awareness of diversity issues, both current and historical. It also means developing your knowledge and understanding of yourself and others and to then be able to apply this knowledge and understanding within your counselling practice.

The Tripartite Multicultural Competency model (Sue, 1998: 440–448) identifies three dimensions needed for cultural competence:

- 1 Beliefs and attitudes
- 2 Knowledge
- 3 Skills.

The three dimensions of culturally competent counsellors are described by Sue as:

- 1 Being aware of their own values, beliefs, and worldviews, and limitations that might impact their work with a culturally different client; paying special attention to the impact ethnocentrism might have on their work with racially, ethnically, and otherwise culturally different clients.
- 2 Making a genuine effort to understand the client's values, beliefs, and worldviews, and how those impact the client's life; the counsellor approaches this in a non-judgemental manner and accepts the client's worldviews as valid.
- 3 Possessing the skills and interventions necessary for working with the culturally different client, as well as practising them in their work with the particular client.

**Q** So would I have to read a lot about different cultures, religions, disabilities, and maybe customs and things like that?

**A** That would be an awful lot of reading and although the information could be interesting, it will not help you really understand your client as a unique individual. Only an intimate relationship with them will do that.

**Q** I'm not sure about whether or not to mention to the client the differences between us. Should they be acknowledged by me or should I wait for the client to mention them?

**A** Again this varies from client to client. For some clients it could feel like they are being labelled and that all you see about them is the colour of their skin, their race,

their sexuality, their gender, or whatever the difference is. And if the issues they are presenting are not related to the difference, it may not be appropriate to raise it. If we were to bring it in unnecessarily it may be that our own agenda starts to get in the way of the client work. However, for other clients it may be absolutely appropriate. Again, it is important not to make assumptions.

- Q** We are back to 'sometimes' aren't we. Sometimes it's ok and sometimes it's not.
- A** Exactly. Acknowledgement of difference when appropriate and an exploration of that within the counselling room can play a significant part in developing the therapeutic relationship. In asking how it is for the client, we are making the client as powerful as we are. As 'the counsellor' we automatically have more power than our client. If the client is someone who lacks power out in society, it can be incredibly helpful and healing to attempt to equal out the power in the therapeutic space.

### Reflection 3.5

Below are some examples of potential questions that might be appropriate when working with clients:

Have you ever been treated poorly because of your race or ethnicity?

What is it like talking to someone who hasn't experienced racism/homophobia/transphobia/sexism/ableism...?

I am quite a lot older/younger than you. How do you feel about that?

I am a different gender to you. How do you feel about that?

What was it like growing up in your family?

These questions could help your client explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Can you think of some other questions or statements that acknowledge the differences between you and your client and which invite further exploration and discussion?

- Q** And what about language. What was appropriate a few years ago is not appropriate now. This is an area I always find worrying. I feel anxious I am going to say something wrong, use the wrong terminology and upset someone. How much do I need to know about current appropriate language?
- A** Making yourself familiar with politically correct language is important and also can be thought provoking. There are many websites that address this clearly and provide

current terminologies. (This is not covered here because the terminology frequently changes.) One example would be ‘a wheelchair user’ rather than someone in a wheelchair. It’s also useful to simply ask your client, *if* it is relevant, how they like to be referred to.

Bringing difference into the room may enhance the therapeutic relationship, but if it’s inappropriate, may in fact damage it.

- Q** I get so tongue tied when I talk about or ask questions about diversity and I don’t want my client to pick up on my nervousness.
- A** Then, keep it simple. In my opinion, questions should also be used sparingly by a counsellor. However, they do of course have a time and place.

## LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- A** Chapter 1 in this book focuses on working safely, which incorporates ethics and the law. There are additional legal and ethical considerations for working with diversity.
- Q** There’s so much to consider and remember.
- A** It’s important that you don’t get caught up with all the details, to the detriment of the relationship with your client. Work hard to be with and understand your client in their world. Remember CHOW – remain *curious*, be *honest* with yourself, strive to stay *open-minded* and *willing* to learn, and challenge your own prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions.

It’s important to strive for a balance between knowledge and understanding.

### The Equalities Act

The Equalities Act was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2010. Its aim is to work towards a fair and just society, with equal opportunity for all. It works legally to prevent people being discriminated against in the workplace and in society as a whole, because of certain characteristics which are vulnerable to discrimination.

These personal characteristics are called ‘protected characteristics’ and it is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of:

- Age
- Disability
- Race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Being pregnant or on maternity leave



- Gender reassignment
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

The law protects those within these protected characteristics:

- At work
- In education
- As a consumer
- When using public services
- When buying or renting a property
- As a member or guest of a private club or association.

The Equalities Act also provides protection for those associated with someone who has a protected characteristic, e.g. a friend, family member, partner. It also protects anyone who complains about discrimination or supports someone else's complaint.

**Q** I know that discrimination means treating someone unfairly and I think I understand that on the whole. For example, if someone applied for a job, they should not be refused the job just because of one of the protected characteristics. I know that in the exam for my counselling diploma, reasonable adjustments have to be made for some students to ensure they are not disadvantaged because of a disability.

In my counselling work, I give all my clients unconditional positive regard. Isn't that a way of offering equality and avoiding discrimination?

**A** Are you really able to offer all clients unconditional positive regard? I haven't managed to do that all the time. My aim is to offer all my clients unconditional positive regard but sometimes I fall short. I can find myself judging or assuming. My own feelings and history can be triggered. I could simply be having a bad day. All these things impact on me being able to offer unconditional positive regard all the time.

We can never be perfect. Progress not perfection is sometimes good enough.

However, the Equalities Act does list some of the ways discrimination can manifest:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect discrimination
- Harassment
- Victimisation
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments.

### Reflection 3.6

Research each type of discrimination named in the bullet points above and what all of them mean.

Have you ever been the victim or perpetrator of any of them?

Have you ever witnessed any of them taking place?

If so, how did you feel and what did you do?

Would you do anything differently now?

## Ethics

Professional bodies have an ethical framework and guidance resources that support and inform our work. There are many resources relating specifically to working with diversity. How does your ethical framework help you in this area?

**Q** I'm a student member of BACP and my ethical framework identifies the principles, qualities, and values I need to have to work safely and ethically. I think about them in relation to my counselling practice as a whole but had never thought about them in relation to specific areas.

**A** With reference to both BACP's and NCPS's ethical frameworks, the ethical principle of *justice* informs our work with diversity by ensuring the fair and impartial treatment of all clients. We can understand the principle of justice by reflecting on how injustice feels.

If we are judged for our behaviour, we have the opportunity to change that if we feel it's the right thing to do.

If we are judged for our colour, gender, disability, etc., we are not able to change these and are therefore powerless in the face of the judgement.

These two things are very different and evoke very different feelings and reactions.

### Activity 3.4

Listed below are the key personal qualities from BACP's ethical framework.

Take your own personal inventory in relation to these qualities and working with diversity.

Identify your strengths and weaknesses.

How can you foster your strengths and develop your weaknesses.

What help and support do you need to do this?

- **Candour:** openness with clients about anything that places them at risk of harm or causes actual harm.
- **Care:** benevolent, responsible, and competent attentiveness to someone's needs, wellbeing, and personal agency.
- **Courage:** the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks, and uncertainty.
- **Diligence:** the conscientious deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a beneficial outcome.
- **Empathy:** the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective.
- **Fairness:** impartial and principled in decisions and actions concerning others in ways that promote equality of opportunity and maximise the capability of the people concerned.
- **Humility:** the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses.
- **Identity:** sense of self in relationship to others that forms the basis of responsibility, resilience, and motivation.
- **Integrity:** commitment to being moral in dealings with others, including personal straightforwardness, honesty, and coherence.
- **Resilience:** the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished.
- **Respect:** showing appropriate esteem for people and their understanding of themselves.
- **Sincerity:** a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
- **Wisdom:** possession of sound judgement that informs practice.

**A** You might find BACP's equality, diversity, and inclusion resources helpful ([www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/edi/edi-resources/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/edi/edi-resources/)).

Another useful resource is a toolkit produced by The Coalition for Inclusion and Anti-Oppressive Practice (n.d.). This brings together organisations with a shared mission to improve working with diversity within the counselling, psychotherapy, and psychological therapy professions.

So far, we have looked at the importance of working with difference and diversity in our counselling work. What do you think the risks to the client are of not acknowledging and working with difference and diversity?

**Q** The client probably wouldn't feel valued and understood. They might feel their culture is ignored or dismissed. I would probably make assumptions and not see the client as a unique individual. This would lead me to ignore or overlook vital information.

- A** Yes, we could unwittingly be dismissing the importance of their unique personal experiences. We could unconsciously be operating from a superior perspective and view the client through a lens of bias and prejudice.

### Reflection 3.7

What do you understand by the term diversity?

How has diversity shaped your counselling practice?

What have you done to foster cultural competence?

Describe your commitment to responding to diversity.

## SUMMARY

- Diversity is complex and covers a wide range of different areas.
- Diversity can impact significantly on our work with clients.
- Self-awareness is of particular importance when working with diversity, alongside an awareness of our own prejudices and assumptions.
- Diversity issues exist within the counselling profession and need acknowledgement.