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A Duoethnographic Study of Power and Privilege in the Psychotherapeutic Space: Dialogical Research as Professional Development

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Abstract

We are three psychotherapists, also trainers at different universities in the United Kingdom, who came together to explore the application of duoethnography as a research method in the context of counselling and psychotherapy. The focus of our dialogues was on privilege and power as experienced between client and therapist in the therapeutic relationship, mirroring the social worlds we each come from and return to. The article presented here is written largely in the form of 'speaking turns,' reflecting the dialogical nature through which data were generated. We met periodically through Microsoft Teams to record our dialogues and furthered our exchange via email communications and other text messages. We came together explicitly mindful of and valuing our differences – one woman and two men; our ethnocultural heritages being Greek, African, and English, with different trajectories towards our professional positions; and we highlight differentials in privilege emerging along lines of gender, race, and class. Emergent themes include: 'the visible – invisible spectrum of privilege,' 'the historic present,' and 'power with versus power over.' As an ongoing, highly relational form of encounter, this project highlighted the benefits this approach can bring in the ongoing development of therapists. Participation facilitated the revelation of more unconscious or unarticulated material. We found the duoethnography depended upon our mutual negotiation of trust and preparedness to be vulnerable in the encounter. Recognising that each dialogue brings unique configurations of similarity and difference, we thus argue for greater uptake of duoethnography methods in counselling and psychotherapy training and research.

Keywords

duoethnography, psychotherapy, privilege, professional development

Introduction

Psychotherapists often chart their journey into the profession through personalised experiences of otherness, marginalisation, and immigration wounds; translated into imperatives towards social justice and community (Bager-Charleson, 2010; Hilman & Rosenblatt, 2018). Yet the profession continues to grapple with the question as to what extent social contexts should be invoked in making sense of personal and intersubjective experiences in the consulting room (Borges & Goodman, 2020; Winter, 2021; McEvoy et al., 2021). Here we present a duoethnographic study as three psychotherapists, also academics at different universities in the United Kingdom, reflecting on our experiences of difference, power and privilege in the therapeutic space. We describe ourselves as follows: Prof. Divine Charura (Divine) identifies as a Black British man of African Heritage; Dr. Fevronia Christodoulidi (Fenia) as a woman from South Europe who holds experiences of 'otherness' as an immigrant in the UK for over 20 years, and

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Dr. John Hills (John) as a white British man of English heritage. This article documents our engagement with the duoethnographic method as a framework through which we consciously spoke from our own social and historical positionalities. We found that through duoethnography we were foregrounding what are typically unconscious and implicit contexts in the therapeutic space. We conclude with reflections about how the duoethnographic method applied within the context of trainee and practitioner development can advance therapist reflexivity.

Duoethnography is a form of dialogical research in which two or more researchers who occupy a shared cultural context generate data about that shared context through dialogue (Norris et al., 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). As a form of first-person research (Roth, 2012) the data are typically represented as a conversation (Norris et al., 2012). The duoethnographic process may not necessarily arrive at consensus, but may instead arrive at a clearer representation of different positionalities within that context (Norris et al., 2012). What makes duoethnography distinctive from autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography is that two or more researchers come together in the spirit of difference, in that we are embedded within the same cultural landscape differently (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), and that data are primarily generated through dialogue (Carless & Douglas, 2021; Keles, 2022). Rinehart and Earl (2016) argue that duoethnography is distinguished because of its focus on the relationship between the co-researchers. The dynamics of this relationship are further elaborated by Burleigh and Burm (2022) through a series of tenets including the interrogation and disruption of stories, the challenging of meanings held in the past in advancing reconceptualisation, and the deepening trust and self-disclosure between the co-researchers. Our immersion in this dialogue required a level of courage to risk voicing difficult experiences as a result of being witnessed and held; this is something that we often referred to as '*offending each other with love*', for instance, when a perception about each other's experience, or that of the people our identity characteristics may represent, did not appear accurate. In the dialogue we sought to advance our perspectives and to find these perspectives evolving through the dialogue, but our polyvocality is preserved and represented in this final research product. In keeping with these epistemological principles, whilst the Introduction and Methodology sections are written formally, most of the article is communicated through 'speaking turns,' mirroring the data generation process, and thus delivered as three differentiated voices.

Occasionally in the data presented below we are quoted as therapists and trainers speaking about encounters with clients and trainees we worked with. These vignettes are composite examples, informed by multiple, similar practice experiences. No actual person is being written about in these vignettes and therefore no-one is identifiable through them.

Duoethnography as Methodology

Duoethnography as a method has been applied to a variety of disciplinary contexts and exemplar studies are distinctive in the creative ways in which dialogue and data are represented. Snipes and LePeau (2017) sought to explore learning partnerships and transformative spaces in higher education, and their dialogue was structured as a play: with a prologue, a series of acts, and then an epilogue. Thiemann and Thiemann (2020), as a husband and wife dyad, produced a chronological account of a series of miscarriages they lived through: they represented the physical, emotional, and psychological toll of miscarriage; the isolation and aloneness couples can feel. Knight and Shipman (2021) generated data through dialogue on their experiences of two women who separately migrated between Britain and Australia. They focused on the role of food as a source of comfort and connection, both with home, and to other migrants. Through their dialogue they advanced the idea of 're-emplacement' - the way that a migrant connects with their new home through the local food.

From its outset we envisaged duoethnography as a triangulation of three voices which we believed would add complexity through the intersections between our different positionalities. We note that established duoethnographic methodology explicitly allows for two or more researchers (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), and consider moreover that each speaking turn had a dual quality – both a response to what the previous turn offered, and also an offering of something new. Breault (2016) observed that there has to be some degree of familiarity between the participants otherwise trust and therefore open exploration may be hard to achieve. However if the researchers are too familiar with each other, they may not be able to highlight the relative blind spots within their positions. There were various ways in which, given our positionalities, power differentials might have been perceived as immediately apparent between us. One might consider for instance Divine's status as a professor, therefore of a higher status to Fenia and John with their doctorates. Similarly one might focus on gender, to consider Fenia's status as a woman and therefore as a relatively marginalised voice in contrast with her two male co-researchers. John's less visible upbringing in a single-parent working class household might place him in a relatively marginalised class status in comparison with Fenia and Divine. Or perhaps focusing on John's status as a white man means that he enjoys privileges denied to both Fenia and Divine. Within us three co-researchers we were able to capture some of the realities of intersectionality[1] – that

depending on which aspects of our identity are foregrounded, the directions of power differentials might be reversed. It is possible that as a duoethnography conducted amongst therapists this brought a level of empathy and courage that allowed for challenging, for instance, gender expectations, more openly. An interesting metaphor emerged which seemed to capture the ancient Greek 'symposium' flavour of such exchange, with the exception that this was not an exclusively male aristocratic activity (Hobden, 2013):

> 'I would have liked to cook for you and feed you (Greek mama style) as we sit around a table with our 'themes' and eat and chat and broach some more… in a kind of a 'symposium' mode… I think it is not accidental that the Greeks were doing philosophy over a feast and lying down… alongside the peripatetic ones who would be dialoguing about our themes over a walk in the forest)'
>
> (Fenia, email, as the lone female voice and a migrant from Greece)

The passage offers an example of the reveries (McVey et al., 2016) we shared between us in making ourselves reflexively visible in the research process (Bager-Charleson, 2014).

Methods

We obtained approval for an ethical review submitted to Author's University's School of Health (application reference 81,878) which served as a founding document reflecting our understandings of how we would work together. As three co-researchers, informed consent was an ongoing process between us. We subsequently met once a month from September through December 2021, and then more infrequently throughout 2022, over Microsoft Teams recording sessions that we called our Dialogues. The Teams application then produced a machine-generated transcript of the dialogue which was subsequently 'tidied up' by John as the data handler, with uncertainties later corrected by Fenia and Divine. However in between these live meetings, we continued to dialogue the same themes through exchanges over email and other text messages. All such exchanges were treated and recorded as data. We did not feel we needed to introduce a structure or agenda to the dialogues, which continued to unfold spontaneously. We understood from the beginning of our exchanges that the focus of the dialogues would be on *power and privilege in the therapeutic space*.

We drew on conventional principles of qualitative data analysis as mapped onto the duoethnographic process. Between one dialogue and the next, data from the transcript were fragmented and grouped where they appeared to indicate recurrent meanings (Chang, 2013). These groupings of data were made available between the co-researchers through shared files. As observed by other duoethnographers (Ashlee & Quaye, 2021; Johannson & Jones, 2019) our themes emerged dialogically: through our retrospective reflections on our own contributions, on interpretations offered by our co-researchers, and in turn our responses to those interpretations. We faced a paradoxical challenge here to arrive at consensus on those themes that nonetheless contained our encounters with difference. The three themes that emerge therefore each represent continua: in appreciating a spectrum of privilege, historical legacies of privilege, and the shifting polarities of power.

Breault (2016) warned against two 'limiting tendencies' within duoethnographic research which we remained mindful of as we conducted our own dialogues. Firstly we were mindful of the possibility of 'parallel talk' where the different voices advance their own theses without these being affected or influenced by the others – no real transformation of meaning has taken place. As Breault observes, the duoethnographic process must 'trouble the waters' (2016, p. 786). As we present the data later in this article, there were clear instances where we worked hard to understand each other's positions even if we occupied a different space and the waters were certainly troubled during that process. The other tendency Breault spoke to was 'theory confirmation' – that duoethnography is used as a platform to merely confirm what we already believe. One mitigation against theory confirmation was to be conscious and explicit about the ideological differences between us.

Sawyer and Norris (2013) theorised about the function of the 'literature as participant' within duoethnographic studies. In keeping with the duoethnographic approach we have not provided a formal literature review to accompany this article but have instead invoked literature where our spontaneous reflections were subsequently indexed back to existing literature. Similarly we offer Discussion for each of the emergent themes in the section they are presented, ending this article with some closing reflections on the duoethnographic process. In this way we offer our own disruption of the conventional structuring of academic journal articles through duoethnography, as exemplified in earlier published studies (e.g. Deckman & Ohito, 2020; Johannson & Jones, 2019; Snipes & LePeau, 2017).

In the sections that follow we seek to represent our differentiated voices through 'speaking turns' reflecting the epistemological principles of duoethnography as explained above.

Positionalities

Fenia. I came to this dialogue as the female voice and a migrant from Greece, having grown up in a fairly mono-cultural and mono-racial society. In that context, one would have thought that people do not reflect on the meanings and dynamics that their skin colour brings. And yet, I am someone who felt 'different' in the school playground; I remember being called a 'gypsy girl' due to my darker complexion.[2] I was seen as 'exotic' in my own country, even though both my

parents are white. When I migrated to the UK, I became aware of evoking all sorts of 'fantasies' in personal and professional circles where people could not clearly conclude where I am from and the ensuing stereotypes. I moved to the UK at age 25 to pursue my training in Counselling and Psychotherapy, something that followed a period of international travel and immersion in different cultures which intensified my questions around belonging and led to existential dilemmas and a quest for purpose. I hold 'minority' status and it is not infrequent when I have been called 'black' in several professional circles, to refer to the fact that I am not 'white British'. The current post-Brexit climate intensifies even further my 'otherness' status in the society I live, where clear distinctions are made about who has the right (or privilege) to live where and for how long, if at all. As a spouse in an inter-racial marriage and a mother to two children of dual heritage, I became attuned to dynamics of difference and intersectionality, often finding myself explaining that these relationships inevitably influence but do not determine my 'agenda' alone, as these issues are to sensitise every single citizen, not only those directly affected in our communities and society at large. The Counselling and Psychotherapy field felt like a 'home' that would hold my 'liminality' (Bjorn, 2009) as it provided a space for all these dimensions of self and experience that are far more nuanced and often invisible.

As a therapist, I am aware that the psychotherapy profession often attracts more women but even in that context, I also recognise the role that age plays, in the sense that as a 'middle aged' female practitioner in my mid 40s, I now fall more in the stereotype that is granted respect and trust for this role, as compared to the younger counsellor I was when I embarked on this journey in my early 20s.

Divine. I am a Black British man of African heritage. My lived experience as a black man living in the UK with the complexities, challenges of experiencing as well as witnessing discrimination, racism and oppression in the world we live in, has heightened my sense for the need for justice equality and love. As a practitioner psychologist and psychotherapist I became passionate about psychotherapy counselling psychology because I found its philosophical underpinnings and values aligned well with my own. Having worked in the old psychiatric asylums in which I witnessed people with psychological distress being alienated from mainstream society, pathologised and systemically discriminated, I decided to engage in further training as a psychotherapist, with the desire to engage in therapeutic relationships and dialogical encounters that would offer a space for working through trauma and existential challenges that would have resulted in psychological maladjustment. Furthermore, being a black man and having experienced discrimination, racism, and oppression in different contexts myself, I believed the values of psychotherapy and commitment to working with diversity of lived experiences across the lifespan would be fulfilling for me.

My own experience when I was a trainee psychotherapist/ psychologist and now as a supervisor and training facilitator I have witnessed the limitations in many curriculums in engaging with the topic of diversity. Often, I have been invited to facilitate just one or two weekends/days on diversity out of the whole years' curriculum, and this has challenged me to think about the need to contribute more around critiquing our profession and its approach to diversity, counselling and psychotherapy theory, training and practice.

Given my own heritage I am influenced by multiple philosophical epistemologies. I integrate from my upbringing I embody and value Ubuntu Philosophy, which at heart is about humanity, community and belonging. It is a humanistic approach focused on creating empowering dynamics and relationships which affirm and treat others as dignified persons regardless of their difference. It argues that all individuals can excel and develop to their full potential if their humanity is placed at the centre of their encounters, and if they feel a sense of respect about their uniqueness/diversity and have a sense of love, belonging and connection (Ukpokodu, 2016). Additionally, I also draw from Eurocentric post-modernist philosophical perspectives, which embrace and value complexity, and an ethos of 'both/and' rather than 'either/or'; this enables me to accept seemingly different or opposing perspectives, paradoxically, side-by-side (Giovazolias, 2005; Wachtel, 2014).

John. In the very early stages of our process together I became acutely aware that I might be in some ways regarded as a kind of dramatic foil and caricature of privilege given the focus of our study. I'm white, male, heterosexual, and able-bodied. As a university lecturer with a PhD and a psychotherapy practice I am visibly middle class. Thus when Fenia and Divine spoke so richly of their own experiences of 'otherness,' my own reflections felt relatively staid in comparison. In one early dialogue I spoke about recently moving house and my qualitative experience was of the stress of removals, solicitors, and stamp duty. Later in the same dialogue Fenia spoke of her father's experience of being made homeless due to British bombing during the Cypriot War of Independence in the 1950s. I thought of the privilege that my own house move might be thought of as ahistorical, and even boring. When I reflect upon how I came to participate in this project I alight first upon my interest in the social determinants of mental health as explored at depth through the works of Marmot (2015) and elsewhere by Wilkinson and Pickett (2011, 2018). I became aware of social determinants theory emerged after I qualified for practice, and it seemed to speak directly to my work as a therapist, particularly, it has to be said, as a student volunteer picking up practice hours working with some of the most vulnerable people in society. One of the ironies of our profession being that typically under-funded third sector organisations, to whom very vulnerable people are often referred, rely on student volunteers to deliver psychological therapies. Whatever good work we might feel we do together

in the 50 minutes of the weekly session, the clients we work with return to social worlds which are often not conducive to self-actualisation, empowerment, or the development of a reflective space; these being some of the over-arching objectives of psychotherapy we learned about in the textbooks.

If I look further back I am conscious of my own positioning on a social gradient (Marmot, 2015). I grew up in a single-parent family, in a post-industrial town in West Yorkshire. I was the first in my family to go to University, and my awareness of not belonging, of not knowing how to be a student; or indeed more fundamentally of not perceiving my 'future' in the same way my more privileged contemporaries did, presented a steep learning curve (Wong & Chiu, 2019).

In the sections that follow we will present data from our Dialogues with theoretical commentary, exemplifying three themes: 'The visible-invisible spectrum of privilege,' 'The historic present,' and 'Power with versus Power over.'

The Visible-Invisible Spectrum of Privilege

One of the themes we conceptualised from the data concerned indicators of our privilege – or the lack of it - within our professional practice ranging from the visible to the more subtle and implicit. As professionals and academics we recognised that we operate within a privileged space given our credentials and role power (Proctor, 2017). However there were other aspects of our identities that were not considered as being or holding privilege.

John: My relatively invisible privilege was centred around class – I identify now as middle class, having acquired the status of a psychotherapist and university lecturer, and yet I was raised in a single-parent working class family. I often notice clients with higher socioeconomic status that there is a kind of game that can go on between us in the early stages of therapy. I notice some anxiety on my part that my higher status clients will see through my PhD, my professional accreditation, my relatively successful career, and instead see (and hear) the boy with the West Yorkshire working class twang in my voice, who can't quite believe I ended up in this position. Much of it does feel to be about class - if a client sees a working class background behind my professional presentation will they lose faith in me and the prospects for the therapy?

Fenia: There are some aspects of my identity which I experience as liminal but which can get lost under stereotypes of skin complexion, accent, and class. When someone first meets me, they often get confused about my cultural background. They may try to guess by my accent or my complexion; I have been called 'Latina' or 'Arabic' which have nothing to do with my Greek heritage. When I first moved to the UK, I lived, studied and practised as a therapist in the Northeast. Some of the first clients I saw spoke the Geordie accent and I had arrived after being taught 'Queen's English' throughout my school years. Some clients found that contrast amusing, some others were a bit apprehensive, some others were just curious.

Divine: What has shifted for me is the clarity that at times clients can make statements that reveal both their privilege but also unconscious bias and discrimination, for example the client who openly but yet innocently relayed to me one of the reasons he came to see me was for discreetness:

> 'Just this week when I asked them [new clients] about their motivation to see me despite me having a waiting list they said "I have tried a few therapists and I was running rings around them, you are a professor and I want someone with serious brain power to help me", the other said, "You are one of the most expensive psychologists in town and I like that", another said "I hope you don't feel offended but I want to see a black therapist…" Later it emerged it was because "I was unlikely to be in the same yacht racing club as him" !!!'
>
> (Divine, email)

In this last excerpt Divine is placed by the clients he has encountered into variable positions of privilege depending on which aspects of his identity are being invoked. In a later email exchange we each considered how our choice of dress in our professional roles was influenced by our awareness of the relatively invisible dimensions of privilege:

> **Fenia**: 'In the earlier stages of my career, I was aware that I was often much younger amongst women in professional groups and the issue around how we present ourselves as therapists – with regards to the feminine side – is rarely discussed. A student of mine once asked 'why do the female therapists I approach look like nuns'? I notice a cultural feature around how expressions of femininity in the workplace may be directly associated with being 'suggestive'. And yet, I have seen my female colleagues in Greece wearing colourful clothes, jewellery and make-up when at work, without this being perceived as 'sexualised' or 'unprofessional'.
>
> **Divine**: 'I am on my way to work to see patients/clients and am wearing a suit. What does that say? For most of my private practice I see very wealthy clients, but notice the disparity in power in society through my work.'
>
> **Fenia**: 'Thinking about your suit Divine.... I am curious about the bow tie too. I find it somewhat endearing but it also brings up curiosity… cause I know nobody who wears a bow tie in my circles. I am also curious about the 'black man and bow tie' and what sort of images that brings in a predominantly white society.'
>
> **Divine**: 'In some African American and some African circles of educated men the bow tie is seen as a symbol of pure undated creativity and a confident willingness to be different but not threatening. Often you will notice mine have sometimes an African bead in the centre or the bow tie is of African floral print. I think in some ways people always notice the bow tie and comment on it, and that includes clients. I think it also comes from my father who I always as a child saw wearing a bow tie and he still does. There is another reason why a lot of black educated men wear bow ties, and it's because in the Deep South and through slavery lots of

> men from ethnically diverse communities who relayed any kind of knowledge were lynched. So there's a whole thing about actually not wearing a necktie. It symbolises remembering and reflecting on the past.'

Fenia observes that there are some theoretical perspectives that assist her in the meaning-making process of the less visible dimensions of her identity and lived experience. Fenia identifies with the concept of being a 'liminal figure'. Liminality is the state of occupying a threshold space; an 'in-between' position. Nolan and West (2020) refer to 'voices from the margins' in an attempt to honour the lived experience of those who do not fit into neat categories or fixed positions.

Divine goes onto observe that if we start from a position of seeing White supremacy as constructed (i.e., there is no biological deterministic basis to the supremacy of White as a racial category onto itself), then we can begin to question and critique how Whiteness is secured, supported, and propped up as a structural reality (Sheehi, 2020). Rather than to split and oscillate between privilege that is visible/invisible we can begin to understand and challenge conceptualizations of identity and identity processes which are complex, and can therefore become more open to lived existence outside the clinical space.

The Historic Present

We utilised the historic present tense as a linguistic device used to reflect upon past actions as though presently unfolding (Park et al., 2011). One may note the historic present in television documentaries as historians trace in present tense a sequences of events, for instance in the arrest, incarceration, trial, and execution of Anne Boleyn over seventeen days in May 1536 on charges of adultery and treason. When we recount past events as though they were currently happening: *I walk down to the harbour, and I see the skies turning black, and hear the first rumbles of thunder as they break across the bay…* such recollections have a greater immediacy and become more visceral: we close the psychological distance from them, recalling greater detail, with more access to primary emotions (Hellawell & Brewin, 2004). However when we refer here to the historic present in the psychotherapeutic space we are going further than descriptions of particular episodes. Moreover we aim to capture how we carry our histories in our psyche, and our genetics; these manifest in our daily relational and societal encounters, as indeed in the therapeutic encounter. These histories are at work through the present; to think of them as consigned to the past may be considered a therapist 'blind spot.'

Ambivalence of Motivations in the Therapeutic Exchange

An exchange over Microsoft Teams captured Divine's reflections on being queried by a client about his vaccination status during the covid-19 pandemic:

> **Divine (speaking as a Black British man of African heritage)**: [The client asked me] Why have you not been vaccinated? Well, she doesn't know me from Adam. I could have taken that head on. I could have asked how she made these assumptions that. [But instead my response was] "It's 6 o'clock, I'll see you next week at the same time…" In my internal dialogue I thought…. how interesting.... yeah, that's your stuff. But really that would separate me and her from our relationship..... so in essence as we are in a therapeutic relationship it's …...it's "our stuff".... its material for us both to work through in the therapeutic relationship I mean, … the challenge as well as the call is to respond with love!
>
> **Fenia (speaking as a migrant from Greece, having grown up in a fairly mono-cultural and mono-racial society)**: So can I be completely honest and suggest that the client is worried about you.
>
> **Divine**: But what about the client just saying to me, I'm worried about you? Why attack me through an assumption ?
>
> **John (speaking as a white British man)**: I guess another word that comes to mind is ambivalence… I hear two possibly radically different interpretations of the client there in terms of one, that idea of invoking a sort of power differential which is suggestive of a racialised idea of contamination. Or perhaps alternatively the client's genuine concern comes through in a really awkward way, or maybe both can be true simultaneously in the spirit us being complicated creatures.
>
> **Divine**: Hearing you say that John I want to be really open to that, and I'm trying to think why that's hard for me to accept because I think that there is something about a lack of trust between us at a really deep cultural unconscious level. Why wouldn't this white upper middle class millionaire woman be worried about me. It's something that's really painful, I think, in the history. There are examples of harm in the cultural layer of my psyche, introjected through narratives of discrimination and evidence of harm, for example the Tuskegee experiment in which a lot of people of my heritage were harmed in the name of science.[3] I spoke earlier about the client who chose me because our paths socially would never cross. He would know that there were no black people at his yacht racing club. The calculation is made. But I am thinking that on one level, perhaps, he wants to care for me on another level perhaps that mistrust is still present. What's important is for me to be deeply conscious about my process, because if I'm not, I will react in a way that's reacting to the countertransference. But then I'm just thinking about what we do right now, is it ever possible to go to these places if we don't confront this?

The exchange provides an example of what we came to understand as the 'duoethnographic challenge.' Taken at face value, the client may have sought clarification out of concern for her own safety. When Fenia and John offered further alternative interpretations of what Divine presented this opened up an awareness of ambivalence in the process, mirroring the process of clinical supervision within the psychotherapy profession.

In this excerpt Divine explored the ambivalence in making decisions in the therapeutic space when we are faced with material that elicits a response that may result in a relational rupture; for example, when a client says something that impacts us in relation to difference or oppression. Psychotherapeutically the concept of broaching may come into play here, in which the therapist explicitly names difference between the client and themselves, so as to communicate that these are not 'off the table' for discussion. The purpose of broaching is to help the client examine the extent to which socio-political factors such as race and ethnicity influence their concerns or perceptions about the therapist (Day-Vines et al., 2007). This can also apply to therapists working with clients from minoritised groups. Day-Vines et al. noted that broaching behaviour refers to a consistent and ongoing attitude of openness with a genuine commitment by the therapist to continually invite the client to explore issues of diversity. Thus, the therapeutic relationship becomes the vehicle for navigating a discussion concerning issues of difference related to race, ethnicity, and culture (Lee et al., 2022).

Trainee Competencies and the Pace of Change

The following email exchange emerged between Divine and John discussing a journal article *'Listen with love': Exploring anti-racism dialogue in psychotherapy and counselling training'* (Denyer et al., 2022). The article offered analysis of the written responses of sixteen trainees at the University of Leeds, to George Yancy's anti-racism letter 'Dear White America.'[4]

John (speaking as a white British man): I do find the way that the students' letters have been deconstructed a little bit unfair. Sometimes the statements seem taken out of context, such as when the respondent identifies themselves as 'innocent liberal white' rather than as the 'bad oppressive white'. I take this as self-deprecating and ironic - the opposite of the interpretation which is subsequently offered. I wonder if these letters could have been understood more in the spirit of students being on a journey towards understanding, and presumably, written in good faith.

Divine (speaking as a Black British man of African heritage): For myself personally, 'the spirit of students being on a journey towards understanding, and presumably, written in good faith' is no longer good enough for me. I think in counselling, psychotherapy and psychology we have for too long now asked for more time on this journey towards understanding, and argued that the theory, some of which is oppressive, was written in good faith…. How long will I accept that in this case, trainees throughout our nation who are in the majority (in whichever way) e.g. ethnicity, social class, etc. need more time in their journey, when the fact is they are about to qualify and go into a multi-diverse world. I think the same applies to us all as therapists…. To challenge ourselves… Furthermore, for myself how long shall I accept and request for more time to understand, and to write in good faith whilst as I continue to do that those who are minoritised suffer? In psychotherapy we have had over a hundred years to clean up our act.

John: What I understand by the point you're making Divine is that whether or not they wrote in good faith, they should be more engaged in (and sensitive to) systemic inequality and privilege than they were and that this was angering to some members of the research team. I felt that they were extending some degree of vulnerability and it felt like they'd been made straw men in the process. A core question emerges for me: Should we accept the current pace of change? In my position I saw the student respondents as being somewhere along a journey; a generational journey which might take hundreds of years. From your position Divine that pace of change is unacceptable. And perhaps the voices of anger that are represented in the paper reflect a demand for a faster pace. At the same time I feel very clearly that that has to be collaborative; that we have to travel together. And this is where my reaction to the paper comes from - how energetic should we be in our challenges to potential fellow travellers for not doing enough, not moving fast enough?

Divine: I think that what you named as 'the extension of some degree of vulnerability' is a matter that illuminates privilege too in that some groups don't have the choice… they could have engaged differently but chose not to. That is as some have said… what I understand as 'the pain of difference': that some have a choice and some don't. It concerns me that we can get to a point of nearly qualifying students and still give them a privilege pass to not engage (/ engage whole heartedly) in such heart/life/existential matters. Anti discriminatory practice in all its forms, and anti-racist practice is a competency/stance that requires such deep work and searching and cannot be/should not be a half-hearted attempt.

This dialogue illuminated our positionalities, with Divine as a black man who has experienced discrimination and is thus passionate about anti-discriminatory practice. Given his own experiences Divine felt the pace with which we are engaging with change in society and indeed in psychotherapy is not proportionate to the seriousness of suffering that marginalised and minoritised groups experience. We reflect here on the apparent burden of a person speaking from a marginalised positionality to educate those whom have privilege. However, where there is a recognition of historic inequity, and a desire for truth and reconciliation, the balance of responsibility falls on those who find themselves in positions of privilege to be open to and to seek out learning; to furthermore use their privilege to create the conditions in which learning can take place. It was in such an active commitment to learning that we came together to produce the duoethnography. One might consider parallel commitments to learning in those who train to become psychotherapists, or indeed qualified practitioners who seek out further development.

Power with Versus Power Over

The following excerpts capture our engagement with power differentials within professional spaces. Thinking in terms of intersectionality, these power imbalances were neither straightforward nor static, but took on a dynamic quality depending on which aspects of our identity were currently being attended to, either explicitly, or more typically within the subtext of our exchanges. John offers the following vignette from his own practice where class differentials appear subtly to be shaping the interaction:

> 'Many of the clients I work with came from more humble backgrounds to be where they are now. And there is perhaps a game that we can play where, to avoid ourselves being scrutinised and exposed for what we 'really' are, we turn the tables and probe the other. A kind of projective identification of our own insecurity. I felt it recently with a client with a very successful professional career, who when we sat down for our first session began with "so tell me about yourself," much as in a job interview. Having not been asked this by a client before I hesitated, but reasoned with myself that this was our first meeting, the client was still feeling round for whether she would like to work with me, and I prided myself on my transparency about process. So I went on to tell her a little about my practice, the perhaps more idiosyncratic ways that I work and she seemed satisfied with my answer. However in this way I had been successfully disarmed, and I reasoned that this is a skill that professional people might deploy in all kinds of contexts.'
>
> (John, email)

Whilst recognising the importance of being authentic, real, perhaps even vulnerable, the therapist also seeks to instil confidence for the client that what they bring can be contained. John's attitude is that typically this relatively formal period of establishing is transitional and that within a few sessions the client and therapist are increasingly able to be authentic with one another, and thus able to collaborate effectively. However Proctor (2017) critiques notions of therapeutic collaboration. For Proctor, this requires the client to subscribe the therapist's worldview and as such that what is being called collaboration may be better described as compliance. It is, Proctor argues, the therapist who determines what is up for discussion as the client may develop a sense for what the therapist does not want to hear. Similarly the therapist is perceived as knowing what is best for the client given their knowledge and expertise. Rather, Proctor argues, therapists should be seeking to facilitate the client's own 'power from within'; which itself would contrast with a 'power with' stance in which agency is shared. However it may be questioned whether this is an entirely realistic or helpful stance. It could be argued that the most meaningful and satisfactory conversations with other humans involve transformations in how we think. It may indeed be the co-creativity of an open, trusting, and reflective encounter with difference in the therapy room which creates the occasion for therapeutic change (Boston Change Process Study Group, 2010).

Outside of the therapy room we also noticed careful negotiation of our power differentials within our roles as trainers in UK higher education too. In this passage Fenia reflects upon a dilemma presented to her by a student on the program balancing care for her young child with the requirements of participation in the training:

> 'Years ago I had a student who emailed me asking if she could bring her 8 month old into group supervision because of breastfeeding… The baby fed during the session and then fell asleep on the breast. The mum had the chance to get out of the house to find herself in the community of her peers. She told me that I was the only person she dared asked such permission…. All sorts of considerations were going through my head such as that we discuss topics that are 'heavy' and how this could potentially affect their dyad… but I gave her the choice and explained that I would not mark her as absent if she could not attend on that day.'
>
> (Fenia, email)

As a female academic, Fenia often encounters nuanced dynamics in the workplace that remind her of the effect of patriarchy within institutions and society more broadly. She has found that purposeful self-disclosure and sharing her own vulnerability in acknowledging difficult feelings in ourselves and others when exploring these topics invites risk-taking in students or supervisees who feel lost or nervous to voice opinions or their own experiences out of fear of either being silenced or attacked. It is as such a 'pedagogy of vulnerability' (Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020) that paradoxically anchors and drives Fenia in her attempt to have power with versus power over students in such dialogue.

Concluding Reflections on Duoethnographic Process

Ethnography is concerned with meanings as embedded within cultures (Richardson, 2000). Here too, this duoethnographic project is not centred upon Divine, Fenia, and John, but on the positionalities we represent. In this sense, the individual is 'indexical' of their culture (Chandler, 2002) – meaning that to some degree information about the individual may tell us something about the entire groups to which an individual has membership. Psychotherapy does not somehow operate outside of the conditions of history, but rather when the client and their therapist meet, they sit together within the historic present – behind the personal sits the cultural and the historic.

As three practitioner-academics we created a frame and the conditions in which we were able to foreground our experiences of difference, to take risks, to get it wrong safely, and to sharpen awareness of our own positionalities. By participating

in this project we were able to draw attentional energy towards implicit historic dynamics – here of received power and privilege - working through and within ordinary and explicit therapeutic process. These dynamics therefore became more available for conscious consideration for Divine, Fenia, and John within our practices as therapists and as teaching academics, and therefore more likely to broach these in dialogical relationship to our clients and to our students. The primary utility of this process therefore has been in the triangulation of the personal with the cultural, and the personal with the historical. We see this movement within our profession towards the internalisation and working through of generational and collective inequities through the personal processing which takes place in the therapy room. Whilst to become a qualified therapist is to acquire a degree of privilege, not least through our role power (Proctor, 2017), research into the motivations of therapists into why they decided to become therapists often highlight the trainee's own experience of marginalisation: whether this takes the form of a desire to help people escape from their own psychic prisons, or to heal immigration wounds (Bager-Charleson, 2010; Hillman and Rosenblatt, 2018).

Boysen (2010) formulated implicit bias within counselling education by offering two parallel cognitive systems for processing our relational encounters with the other: the associative system and the rule-based system. The former is relatively unconscious, constructed out of stereotypes, allowing us to make fast decisions; whilst the other is relatively conscious, and compatible with reflective and nuanced perspectives. A therapist might learn in a rule-based fashion how to relate to those in whom she perceives otherness, in the spirit of everyday, ethical practice. However we found that the duoethnographic process enabled us to bring into consideration the associative style of processing which is typically at work unconsciously in our relational encounters. Therefore the purposeful triangulation of one's personal experience with their positionality – to speak from their positionality, and their experience of otherness – is the primary recommendation for practice we offer. We believe that a frame can be created for this work with the 'personal and professional development' sessions typical of psychotherapy training curricula here in the UK, of comparable continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities available to qualified practitioners, and indeed for the production of further duoethnographic research within our profession. We will now offer some concluding remarks on the experience of process from each of the co-researchers:

> **John**: One of the lasting impressions I take away from this project is that I felt challenged to articulate feelings that were only on the edges of my awareness but which became foreground through our dialogues. I emerge from our dialogues with a clearer sense that when we talk about privilege, this is a reductionist concept – the reality is multidimensional and multipolar. Nonetheless it has been highly useful as a construct to bring structure to our reflections. I see the reality of privilege both in my professional worlds and in my personal life; I also understand more keenly that privilege includes differentials that range from the overt to the much more subtle and hidden. When Divine and I debated the pace of change (see The Historic Present section) I was acutely and uncomfortably aware of my privilege in occupying the position I had.

There are clear limitations in the method, not least that we are just three individuals occupying our own spaces within a complex cultural landscape. Aside from our differences, we are each in heterosexual marriages, with children, each in academic positions at UK universities, and so on. There is as such a case for further duoethnographic research which engaged with other dimensions of difference through the makeup of participants.

Divine: As Norris and Sawyer (2012, p. 17) state, duoethnography as a collaborative research methodology invites us as researchers to 'model a state of perpetual inquiry' in the presence of another. In my experience of this process I have deeply valued our work and encounters in untangling and disrupting my own assumptions (Burleigh & Burm, 2022) while paying attention to the broader meta narratives of *The visible-invisible spectrum of privilege, the historic present, and of power.* I agree with Burleigh and Burm (2022) that there is a fluidity and flexibility to the methodology that enables me to change my mind and write more conversationally in developing and transforming my thinking. However a further limitation and challenge has been the length of time that has been needed to continually engage in dialogue analyse data, and to rightly give the process the time it deserves.

Fenia: As we have been orchestrating our process in the making of this article, Divine and John have been 'accountability partners' (Smith et al., 2018) when reflecting on the themes of power and privilege, in a space where one can take a deeper dive without the paralysing effect of rage, shame or anger that such themes often evoke. In that sense, this example of Duoethnography stands as an avenue for personal and professional development which in the years to come I wish to maintain and teach to students and fellow practitioners and academics in the fields of counselling, psychotherapy and qualitative research.

When discussing with the co-researchers in this article, the metaphor of a volcano appeared in my consciousness where '*something is constantly cooking and as we challenge each other's perspectives, the volcano erupts... and there is no turning back*'. By that I refer to the awakening of our awareness in being able to view what was perhaps at a more unconscious state previously. When I shared this image with my co-researchers, I realised that the duoethnographic encounter creates this rapture. The process then remains constantly active and further unarticulated material finds expression. This draws obvious parallels with what happens in clinical spaces between psychotherapists and their clients as they learn to 'trust the process' and allow for what is less visible to emerge into awareness; to be known and integrated.

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The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Statement

Ethical Approval

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Notes

1. The Centre for Intersectional Justice (2023) defines intersectionality as describing 'the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique dynamics and effects.' (n.p.)
2. Whilst some people identify with the term 'gypsy', for others the term might be regarded as a slur. The word has been deployed historically to stereotype travelling people (French, 2014)
3. For more on the Tuskegee experiment kindly see more information through The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2013)
4. Yancy's letter (2015) was published in the New York Times. Yancy challenges white people to confront their own unconscious racism and privilege, and to become allies for people of colour. https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/

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