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Elephant in the therapy room - Conversations about race, ethnicity, and culture in CBT Practice

Faithful Odusote & Taf Kunorubwe

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Aims of the session

- Rationale for having conversations concerning race, ethnicity, and culture within CBT
- Reflect on the reasons why we might find these topics 'difficult' or choose to avoid them.
- Consider how to appropriately include discussions about race, ethnicity, and culture

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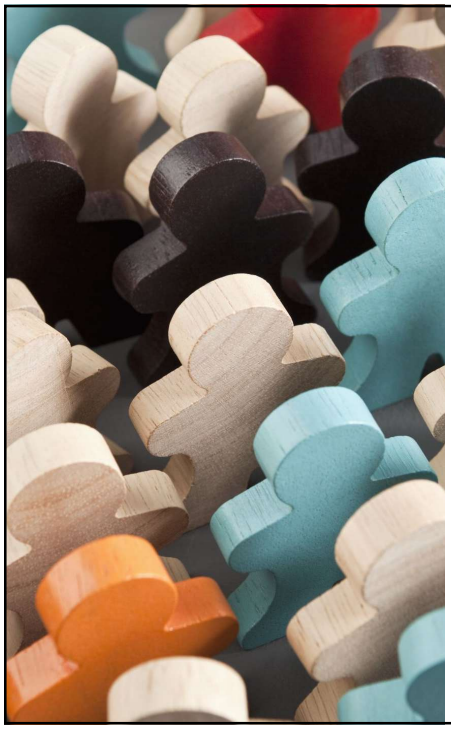

A word about Terminology

- **Race** refers to a socially constructed category based on physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair texture, and facial features. Has been historically politically driven and used to establish social hierarchies (Bryant et al., 2022)
- **Culture** encompasses the beliefs, attitudes, customs, traditions, values, language, and behaviours shared by a particular group of people. It defines the way of life of a community or society and shapes individuals' identities and interactions within that group.
- **Ethnicity** pertains to shared cultural characteristics, such as language, ancestry, religion, and traditions, that unite a particular group of people. It is often based on common cultural heritage and can encompass a variety of factors beyond physical appearance.

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Rationale for having conversations concerning race, ethnicity, and culture within CBT

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Significant role

- Profoundly influence every aspect of illness and adaptation, including interpretations of and reactions to symptoms; explanations of illness; patterns of coping, of seeking help and response; adherence to treatment; styles of emotional expression; and relationships between patients, their families and healthcare providers (Kirmayer et al, 2011).

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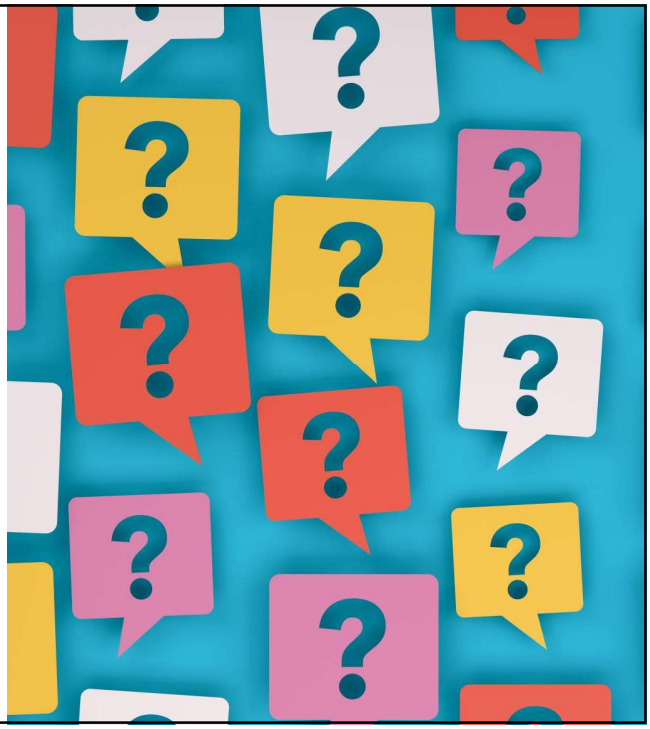
Why think about this topic

- Legislative and Political Frameworks
- Education Policies
- Healthcare Policy Framework
- Health & Healthcare Inequalities
- Clinical & Occupational Outcomes
- Research and Literature Recommendations
- Client perspective!!!



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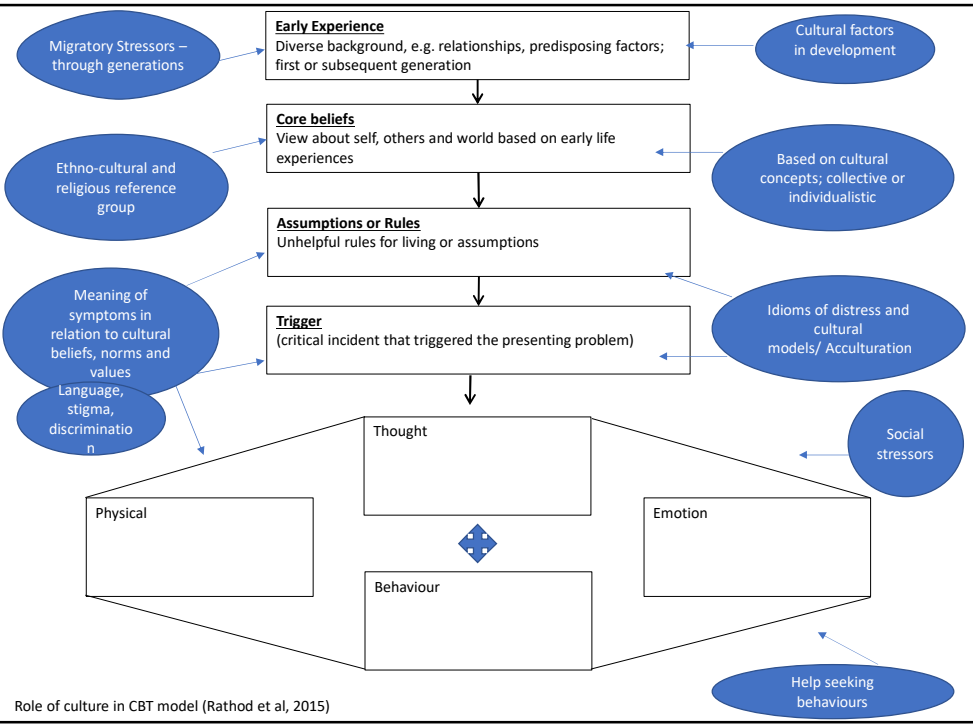

Role of culture in CBT model (Rathod et al, 2015)

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Therapists can err in ignoring culture or over attributing cultural influence on problems. Therapists who do not even notice a client's race or do not inquire about religious beliefs are guilty of the first error

(Padesky & Greenberger, 1995, p. 41)

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Some of the reasons why we might find these topics 'difficult' or choose to avoid them

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Why we avoid these topics?

(Odusote & Kunorubwe, in Press)

- Fear of offending
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Unsure how to raise the topic / have the conversation
- Internal biases / assumptions
- Lack of reflection on own identity / positioning
- Assumptions about whose responsibility
- Concern about it being traumatising or re- traumatising
- And many other therapist schema

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Considering to appropriately include discussions about race, ethnicity, and culture in assessment, formulation and treatment.

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Improving confidence or comfort in having difficult conversations

- Chow et al (2020) – Introspection and Reflection alone didn't improve ability or confidence in managing difficult conversations.
- However, ongoing exposure and feedback had a significant positive effect.

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Self Practice

- Practising CBT methods on oneself and reflecting on the experience can help therapists to address the kinds of professional and personal issues identified above (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001).
- Improving confidence and competence involves:
  - Self Formulation
  - Data logs
  - Thought records
  - Problem Solving
  - Exposure
  - Behavioural Experiments
  - ETC
- All of which can be supported through Supervision and feedback

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Approach conversations with humility, curiosity, respect and collaboration

- Where appropriate to look for opportunities to ask about culture, ethnicity and culture in a collaborative way e.g. "**you have mentioned your culture, would it be helpful for me to understand a bit more about …"**
- Acknowledge the difference and areas we aren't aware e.g. **"as, someone from a different culture I am not as familiar with x, would it be helpful to …"**
- Helpful to be open e.g. **"Are there aspects of your background and culture that are important for us to take into account as we do …?"**
- When we get it wrong (which happens!) actively work to acknowledge, address and repair the rupture

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Summary of the session

- Recapped on the rationale for having conversations concerning race, ethnicity, and culture within CBT
- Reflected on the reasons why we might find these topics 'difficult' or choose to avoid them.
- Considered how to appropriately include discussions about race, ethnicity, and culture

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Want to keep the conversation going or have questions?

Faithful Odusote – hello@faithfulodusote.com

Taf Kunorubwe – info@mindfulnessinreading.co.uk

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