From difference to intersectionality: challenges and resources

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Abstract

In this paper I take up the theme of enabling difference in terms of the challenges and resources posed by taking the intersectional character of differences seriously. Drawing in particular on feminist debates, current discourses that address questions of structural, especially racialized, inequalities through notions of difference are critically evaluated as limited in their analysis of power relations and practices around the transformation of power inequalities. Applying this to questions of service design and delivery, I introduce the concept of intersectionality – in particular the intersection of 'race' and gender – to illustrate four key problems that this framework allows to come into focus: discourses of cultural autonomy as reflecting those of liberal individualism; 'race anxiety' as a form of obsessional undoing of the effort to challenge racism; how attending to 'race' and culture typically works to privilege 'race' over gender; and how discourses of specialization (whether around diagnosis or cultural background) can paradoxically work to exclude women from, rather than to extend, service provision. It is suggested that, rather than difference, intersectionality could be a more promising starting point for critical thinking and practice.

Keywords: difference, racial inequality, intersectionality, gender, race

Beyond enabling difference

'Enabling difference' is an interesting theme – indicative of a current central challenge *for* counselling and psychotherapy, and an outcome of a longstanding discussion among its practitioners over the past decade (which is a discussion as old as psychoanalysis): how to acknowledge and work with structural axes of difference as creative and valuable resources? But, beyond this, how to *work with* such differences, rather than

portraying them as obstacles to be overcome on the road to some fictional universalized state of complete, mutual understanding or relatedness?

Moreover, this state of affairs (with lower- or upper-case 's/S') has political as well as psychological and interpersonal resonances. Current social policies promoting 'social inclusion' tend to overlook critical appraisal of precisely what it is those designated 'excluded' are to be included *into*. And the historically and culturally specific features, or contents, constituting the ideal-typical relationship of understanding/communication/intersubjectivity (or whatever we want to call it) tend to 'wash out', or to become invisible in these policies. By such means our social account of the helping relationship tends to return to an individualist one, and our focus on difference threatens to become pathologizing again.

So what is at stake in enabling difference is not only attending to another's difference but also a matter of breaking out of the mire of stultifying uniformity that the discourse of difference at least attempts to throw into question. For this is all that our generalized models have given us so far, at least as far as the contribution of psychology goes (which is my original disciplinary background).[1] And here I cannot but note the longstanding and escalating influence of psychology – through its methodological as much as its practical effects (Rose 1985; Parker 2002).

So who is different? Well we all are. No one is a norm, since a norm (of the kind that inhabit our models) is a statistical abstraction with no reference to any concrete, material entity. Hence we all gain from the enabling of difference. Yet projects of the last decade to 'enable difference' (whether this is as imperative, exhortation, gerundive…) are all too often in the name of helping or supporting 'others', that is others less fortunately situated than 'ourselves'. This is where we see the liberalism creep back into a radical project through the liberal humanism of wanting to extend to others the opportunities available to ('us' as) the privileged few. More than this, the very articulation of the position of 'other' implies the marking of differences, whose explicit or implicit devaluation demands rectification. By such means it also thereby produces a normalized (and equally inadequate) version of self.

We need to go beyond enabling difference, since this paradigm only brings us more of the same (so to speak); that is, if we follow Foucault on this, it is the same old story of the regulation of the normal as part and parcel of the pathologization of difference, and vice versa.

Now, although I speak here as both academic theorist and group analytic practitioner, the main theoretical resource I am going to draw on is feminist theory. Others may well usefully draw on other resources,

and I make few claims to these analyses as unique. What I shall try to do is to link some of the critical theory that I have found useful with discussions of practice, albeit of more general service practice than specifically counselling or psychotherapy. I am going to draw especially on (what I shall call) anti-racist feminisms – taking this as a space of engagement and contest around the practical and conceptual relations between racisms and sexisms. These bring together a range of critical theories and practices across the social and human sciences, including feminist engagements with postcolonial theory. I shall indicate why and how these are relevant and useful discussions for us as practitioners of the conduct of relationships as a medium for personal and political change.

So I shall start by elaborating three key problems with some of the current ways the discourse of difference functions before I move onto describe the practical and political advantages of moving away from analyses of difference to focus instead on what I shall call 'intersectionality'.

From 'difference' to 'power'

The first problem is to do with the inadvertent ways the discourse of difference can work to erase power. This is the conclusion that various feminists have arrived at over the past ten years about what marks the circulation of discussions of 'difference' (e.g. Maynard 1994; Brah 1996). All too often, within current policy or practice contexts, talk of difference or diversity codes for power inequalities, but precisely through this euphemistic coding it loses its critical analytical edge. 'Different' people are those who deviate from the norm by virtue of their subordinated (in this country usually – except in relation to class[2] – minoritized) positions. Now this formulation is useful in highlighting what the various forms of difference have in common, i.e. their marginalization. When do we notice a 'difference' except when it deviates from some – usually assumed – norm?

Hence talk of difference is not about all differences, but about those that, within dominant discourses, are marked with other kinds of 'd's, as deviant or deficient. In psychology an influential example of the effort to counter this was Ed Sampson's (1993) book *Celebrating the Other* – a title that suggests something of the enthusiasm as well as perhaps naivety of this strategy of the past ten years. This attempt to reverse or change the pathologizing gaze into one of acceptance, respect and hospitality can sometimes be useful in opening up other agendas. But it can also paradoxically work to erase precisely what is different about each of those differences, while appearing to level out power relations into *mere* differences. This not only abstracts the difference from the structural

relationships that gave rise to it, so restoring the location of the difference on to the already pathologized other – with all the attendant sequelae of victim-blaming that we know only too well. More than this, it threatens to reduce all forms of difference to the same – hence covertly obviating its rationale.

Whether as experience, social relation, subjectivity or identity, 'difference' has offered some advantages over previous accounts in attempting to come to grips with axes of structural and psychological differentiation, but there are limitations too. Later I offer some examples of the injustices perpetrated through the homogenization of differences and overlooking of specificities. Here, making a different connection, I have time only merely to mention my worry about how models of intersubjectivity within psychotherapy tend to under-theorize struggle and conflict, and so (especially with the move made from psychotherapy to empirical developmental psychology) invite a normalization and generalization of models of relationship and erasure of positive forms of difference, and by such means usher in an erasure of positive forms of difference. (I have in mind here work such as that of 'The Process of Change Study Group' (Stern *et al.* 1998).)

A second set of problems within the discourse of difference is probably more familiar from political than therapeutic contexts. Once we start attending to differences, it becomes easy for these to become reified and separated from each other into lists of differences than can proliferate endlessly. Since the 1980s, modernist political movements (Marxism and feminism, for example) have fragmented under the charge of ignoring or down-playing the perspectives and oppressions wrought by the positions accorded to (in particular) black and working-class women and lesbians. This important critique not only enumerated more forms of difference than our homogenized political and therapeutic models had acknowledged, it also instituted political hierarchies of oppression that in their turn became oppressive in silencing those without apparent claim to such (now supposedly revalued) differences. Philosophically and politically a solipsism set in that rendered another's experience *so* different and specific as to render communication or relationship impossible. The efforts to offer 'cultural matching' within service delivery is a practical example of this, with all the bizarre consequences of the levels of specificity – or crudity – of exploration of what is matched, and why, alongside the occlusion of the key question of who defines what the relevant axes of difference are. The feminist poet and theorist Adrienne Rich (1975: 306) wrote of 'white solipsism' to indicate something of the default racialization inevitably (but not accidentally) implied by that philosophical position: 'to think, imagine, and speak as if whiteness described the world' (ibid.: 299).[3]

There is a third problem with the discourse of difference – especially of enabling difference – in relation to questions of power. For while it may seem that, for those who can, assuming a position of enabling difference is the obvious way to do something about current inequalities, it is still cast within the idiom of empowerment or 'giving voice'. That is, it still presumes the power and privilege of the giver and in so doing reinscribes the very relationship of paternalism and colonialism that it was set up to correct or transcend. Empowerment is a paradoxical enterprise that can function to empower the already empowered more than those positioned as in need of empowerment. Over the past decade a widespread critique of empowerment has emerged that extends from the far reaches of international aid and development and (anti)global-ization (Gronemeyer 1993; Cooke and Kothari 2002) to the intimacies and intricacies of psychological and psychotherapeutic relations (Bhavnani 1990).

Getting personal/political about difference

So it seems that efforts to attend to, if not enable, difference are self-defeating – either by reinstating the very power hierarchies or relationships of privilege they sought to change or by elaborating differences beyond the possibilities of relationship (and so leading us bizarrely back to an asocial, essentialist ontology).

Notwithstanding my comments so far – and reversing the theme I began with – I do believe that attending to differences *is* enabling: not by talking of differences in general, but by talking of particular, but situationally constructed, specificities. So, notwithstanding how all categorization necessarily imposes some degree of symbolic violence, I am going to discuss how we might work to enable difference in therapeutic work in ways that engage and implicate us all. The general line of my argument goes like this: abstracting any single dimension of 'difference' as a focus of concern or intervention is inevitably – conceptually, politically and therapeutically – inadequate. However addressing 'intersectionality' – that is, the intersection between and within these various dimensions of difference – offers ways of working towards a more fruitful therapeutic and political practice.

The principal axes of social structural difference whose intersection I want to make my focus here are gender and culture (but, as we shall see, class and racialization are key players too). These are areas that tax us greatly as therapists and - beyond the micro-politics of the consulting room or the university – within broader social practices. While second-wave feminist critiques ushered analyses of power relations into all domains – including the privatized space of the therapeutic relationship

– even these tended to overlook structural (e.g. class, racialized) differences between women as materially and psychically relevant. A focus on gender alone can reinstate the privilege of middle-class white heterosexual women.

More recently, the 'war against terror' has succeeded in fuelling racism to such an extent that even refugees are endowed with terrifying properties, and are denied basic human rights. Sara Ahmad (2002) has described the sticky chains of signification that connect 'terrorism' to 'asylum seeker' in the dominant imaginary. What could be more ironic for us as mental health practitioners, given the multiple resonances of the 'asylum' as a place of refuge from both distress and persecution? Perhaps, within a political climate that emphasizes inclusion but functions according to a Fortress Europe mentality, it is significant that racism, in the sense of being found to be racist, generates great anxiety within public institutions. This happens notwithstanding the ways – post-McPherson (1999) – the recourse to a discourse of 'institutionalized racism' has more recently come to function as a *disclaimer for* racism, rather than an *interrogation of* its unintentional processes. (Revelations in 2003 about the rampant racism within the Greater Manchester police force are of course close to home for me.)

So, amid a cultural climate of heightened awareness of the meanings accorded to racialized differences, alongside the naïve polarizations and dichotomizations that contexts of massive political and personal insecurity engender, two things can happen within our everyday personal and professional interaction. First, 'race', that hotly contested domain, becomes so highly charged and thoroughly infused within our political consciousness that it becomes unmentionable, or what group analysts have termed 'socially unconscious' (Dalal 2001; Hopper 2003; Weinberg 2003). Second, in allowing this to happen we render inaccessible the means by which we can dismantle its paralysing effect, and so perpetuate it. As I shall go on to argue, a third problem is that in so doing we overlook areas of significant continuity produced by the intersection of structures of gender and racialization, and indeed thereby fuel further exclusionary practices.

Now I appreciate that I am asserting all this in a very declarative and dogmatic way. So let me briefly indicate something of how I have arrived at this framework by way of moving to explaining it.

From difference to intersectionality

Since the 1970s, discussions of the politics of 'mental health' (or rather 'illness') have generated large literatures about both gender and mental health (usually focused on women, but more recently men) and

'race' and mental health (for reviews see, e.g., Burman *et al.* 1998; Bondi and Burman 2002). Pathbreaking as this work has been, it has failed to engage with the diversities and overlapping character of both gender and race. We have now had ten years of debate that highlights how admitting a more extensive description of racialization (as a political structure) enables the analysis of how – within current horizons – we are all 'raced' (e.g. Charles 1992; Frankenberg 1993; Ware 1992). Hence the question becomes not whether but 'how' we are 'raced' (as 'black' or 'white', for example).[4] From this we can start to think about the different ways gender and 'race' are articulated (or played out within specific material-political practices) and articulate each other. So black women (using the term 'black' here in its broadest sense as a political category) have a different trajectory within mental health services from both white women and black men (Aitken 1996). At the same time, black women have mental health support needs as both women *and* as members of a cultural or racialized minority group. If we fail to appreciate how these two positions interact or intersect then we effectively rule out major areas of their experience that have key service provision and delivery implications.

In the academic domain feminist, postcolonial and anti-racist theorists have elaborated some compelling and useful analyses. Once we move away from mutually exclusive categorizations (of gender *or* race, for example), not only do we depart from the invidious modality of identity politics that divides and fragments so as to render alliance and coalition nigh on impossible (Bondi 1993; Spelman 1988). Beyond this, we also gain some really generative fields of inquiry. Racisms, for example, can be analysed as gender-specific in their forms (and also classed and endowed with sexuality), while gender is also raced (Bhavnani, 1994). We have only to think of Freud's 'dark continent', with its simultaneously raced and gendered inflections, to see how the position of those who are (according to various frameworks) so orientalized or othered are not only feminized as a general category but also that this has specific, and specifically different, consequences for both the men and women so designated.

These consequences lie beyond theorizing what feminists have sometimes described as the double or triple burden carried by black and Third World women. This multiplication of identities, beyond proliferating to an infinite regress (as when you 'add in' class position, sexuality, age, degree of able-bodiedness, educational level, regional location, etc.), leaves out both the further constraints and the opportunities produced by the *intersection* of structures of racialization and gender. In particular, a key area noted by anti-racist feminists is the way women's lives and identities are bound up with – in the sense of

being regulated by – definitions of cultural practice. There are longstanding sets of associations between woman, nation and state that anti-racist feminists have been highlighting for some time (e.g. McClintock 1995; Brah 1996; Yuval-Davis 1997). This slippage in women's accorded positions from biological to cultural reproduction is central to the oppressive focus on the regulation of women's sexuality and reproduction that occurs within all societies. Challenging the equation between traditional gender relations and cultural practice (whether dominant or minoritized) has therefore become a vital arena for feminist intervention.

Engendering culture/'racing' gender

I am going to mention briefly four consequences, exemplified within some recent research projects I have co-directed on attempted suicide and self-harm in South Asian women (Chantler et al. 2001) and domestic violence and minoritization[5] (Batsleer et al. 2002). Both were local, policy-relevant action research projects, which were controversial in relation to both feminist and anti-racist practice by trying to work both together, or rather against each other (cf. Burman and Chantler in press; Burman et al. 2004). While not explicitly concerned with the design and delivery of therapy,[6] they engaged areas relevant to a wide range of services, including especially mental health services. My analysis here is therefore generated from this engagement with practice, albeit informed by the last decade of feminist and anti-racist debates. I hope that from these examples the urgent need to acknowledge the complex interplay between culture and gender within therapeutic practices becomes more evident.

Individualist legacies: privatizing culture

My first point concerns the slippage from individual privacy to cultural privacy. We know that individualism is inscribed in all discourses of social practice – spanning the explicitly disciplinary and governmental activities of the state and the apparently autonomous structures of civil society. Moreover, this binary is fast collapsing given the ways the 'third sector' is being recuperated – via a process sometimes also termed professionalization – as the new route for trans-state-sponsored social and financial regeneration (Larner 2000, 2002). As with other forms of abuse, institutional and community responses to domestic violence typically bring analyses of women's rights and positions into stark contest with discussions of cultural rights and discourses of multi-

culturalism. Dominant conceptualizations of, and practical responses to, the situation of minoritized women facing domestic violence indicate a crucial collusion between notions of individual autonomy (enshrined in the public/private divide which also until recently allowed a husband to rape his wife in England and Wales) and cultural autonomy.

Notions of cultural autonomy or privacy as warranting minority rights therefore arise as an extension of individual rights. Perhaps it is so obvious as to seem banal to remind ourselves that the default position within the British brand of multiculturalism – with its reification of tradition and culture (Sivanandan 1985; Hall 2000) – is that communities can do their own thing as long as they do not bother anyone else. Hence *laissez faire* cultural, as well as industrial, capital prevails. But the effects of this are far from banal. Violence becomes subject to cultural relativity and communities either 'look after their own' or 'it's a cultural thing' (see Burman *et al.* 2004).

Obsessional undoing: 'race' anxiety

Moreover, once installed, this cultural privacy or specialization produces particular barriers to intervention and provision. Typically, mainstream services appear either unable to deal with the cultural and language barriers they attribute to, or may actually encounter when faced by, some minority ethnic women seeking support. Or (more importantly) they *feel themselves to be* insufficiently culturally equipped to work with minoritized women. And it is this feeling of inadequacy or lack of expertise that comes to exert a particular effectivity – in the form of a political subjectivity that we have come to call 'race anxiety' (Chantler *et al.* 2002). Providers worry about being culturally inappropriate or (eliciting accusations of being) racist if they question or criticize particular practices occurring within minoritized groups. According to the logic I have identified regarding the elision of gender within discourses of 'race' and culture, this includes what are perceived to be 'culturally specific' practices.

Hence, albeit generated through the fear of – and precisely through the effort to try to avoid – being racist, this paradoxically does its opposite. For failure to challenge these assumptions about culture in fact feeds racist myths that make it seem that only other communities condone violence or are by their nature particularly oppressive to women.[7] This institutionally constituted, but individually experienced, 'race anxiety' is thus particularly pernicious in the way it exercises a major grip on practitioners and policy-makers alike. True to the nature of obsession, that which is being avoided is what is made to happen.[8]

I should emphasize that I am describing defences that operate at cultural and institutional as well individual levels. Clearly, this is not an enabling approach to difference – for anyone.[9]

Privileging 'race' over gender

A key practical effect of this 'race anxiety' is that cultural issues are accorded greater priority than gender issues.[10] For the focus on cultural autonomy or cultural respect works to position cultural identifications as primary to minoritized women, rather than as intersecting with their gendered status. Now, irrespective of the range of general perspectives one could adopt on the status of religion or culture in relation to women, none explicitly or necessarily supports the abuse of women. The problem, rather, concerns how dominant discourses of culture reify minority community practices that have in fact developed in interaction with (whether in accordance with or in reaction against) the dominant culture. Included in this are the seemingly 'positive' ways of representing minority cultures – by romanticizing or exoticizing them. Either way, culture is treated as static, is equated with religion and is treated as somehow a more primary axis of difference or identification than gender.

This multiculturalist motif combines with a political climate of escalating racism – currently in Britain as elsewhere – especially towards Muslims and people identified as in some way 'Asian'. It also means that women seeking refuge from violence and abuse, or attempting to access other forms of support, outside their supposedly natural cultural communities often encounter so much racism that they end up returning to the abuse.[11] Here, if a woman has concerns about the tightness of community networks compromising the confidentiality of her therapy, especially where it is provided by a culturally specialist organization that may share traditional cultural values, presumptions on the part of providers around cultural matching may be actively unhelpful, and so function as a disabling approach to difference.

Making difference 'special'

Typically, sensationalist discourses of 'specialness' or 'specialization' are central to representations of cultural difference. These work to deny the mundane and common aspects of the effects of domestic violence. Within our study we found that making our general focus 'minoritization' (rather than specific cultural communities or comparisons between communities) was useful, because we could challenge specific cultural stereotypes by showing them to be general.

Two further key consequences follow from the widespread discourses of specificity or specialization – whether we think of specificity in terms of the presenting problem (e.g. self-harm or domestic violence) or in terms of questions of cultural origin or identification. First, each functioned as a warrant for disengagement or passing on to some supposedly better qualified or specialized practitioner (see, e.g., Chantler *et al.* 2002; Burman *et al.* 2002). So, an Asian woman presenting with issues of attempted suicide or self-harm could be referred from Accident & Emergency Department to a culturally specialist voluntary sector agency on the grounds of lack of expertise, that is, not knowing the language and/or culture; while the voluntary organization they were referred to would send them back on the grounds of not having the skills/ expertise to work with this area of acute distress.[12] The attributed identification of 'special', far from generating extra resources, para-doxically worked to deny these claimants access to even ordinary facilities. So much for 'specialist services'.

Here we see an interesting, if challenging, connection with the value currently being accorded to the position of 'not knowing' within a wide range of psychotherapeutic circles (Newman and Holzman 1999; Anderson and Goolishian 1992). Refusing the 'expert' position in this case is not progressive (or helpful or therapeutic). It works in paradoxically exclusionary ways. It even functions to rationalize or sanction these exclusions, by those in dominant positions failing to take responsibility for the knowledge deficits.

But, second, the specificity of focus (around domains of pathology or cultural identification) also does some further political work in refusing to admit their intersectionality and so returning difference to the arena of the individual. For it obscures the ways the state creates the conditions for, and sometimes actively colludes in, violence against women. This happens, of course, through explicit state structures of immigration legislation and deportation, but it also happens less overtly through the withholding of work permits from asylum seekers. Further, beyond both these, yet even more perniciously, there is the withholding of entitlement to benefits from women who came to the UK as spouses if their marriages break up within one (and fast becoming two) years (see, e.g., Hayes 2000; Cohen 2002). This often works to exclude such women even from access to refuges[13] (which rely on claiming such benefits as their revenue).

Here, alongside these vast practical difficulties, we should note how this occlusion of state responsibility bolsters broader discourses of cultural pathologization as well as, or crucially by virtue of, its specifically gendered version in terms of the question: 'why doesn't she leave?' This question recurs in both popular and professional arenas in

relation to women living with violence and, cast in this form, it ignores the state and institutional barriers that prevent women leaving. Hence the intersection of currently circulating discourses of culture and gender works to portray minoritized women as either particularly trapped or particularly weak-willed and masochistic.

Perhaps one feature that is common to all psychotherapies is the analytical – and therapeutic – importance accorded to being able to tolerate and engage with the encounter with an/other, without assimilating that other to received structures and so robbing them of that difference or otherness. As such, we have a deep conceptual as well as urgent current political investment in fostering ways of enabling difference. But, as in therapeutic processes, such moments are likely to be attained only provisionally, uncertainly and probably fleetingly, before shifting into more familiar and so defended territory. In this paper I have discussed practical examples of interventions around the conceptualization of the intersections of 'race' and gender as illustrations of the limits of some currently circulating modes of enabling difference. I have also indicated directions towards challenging those that are capable of informing changes in service policy and practices. The rather immediate and (I hope) compelling contexts of this work – services around attempted suicide and self-harm and domestic violence – illustrates some of the key problems that arise when we attempt to enable differences without attending to the ways axes of identified differences, such as gender and culture, intersect. However, if we can work through the 'race anxiety' we will be better equipped to acknowledge and address these, and other, intersections. As such, we will be in a better position to enable difference, to be enabled by difference and to be differently enabled so as to be able to respond and intervene in specific and useful ways.

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Notes

1 This is rather than the case history approach of both medicine and psychoanalysis, which – at least in some contexts – present other political possibilities.

2 And precisely by virtue of the structure of class privilege, notwithstanding their majority status, working-class people are also minoritized within institutional practices (such as therapy and counselling).

3 Drawing on this analysis, Spelman (1988) elaborates Rich's account in terms of what she calls somatophobia, or flesh-loathing, that constructs racism and misogyny alongside and against/in relation to each other, highlighting their common theme of repudiated and displaced sexuality.

4 As Brah puts it:

> This means that 'white' feminism or 'black' feminism in Britain are not essentialist categories but rather that they are fields of contestation inscribed within discursive and material processes and practices in a post-colonial terrain. They represent struggles over political frameworks for analysis; the meanings of theoretical concepts; the relationship between theory, practice and subjective experiences, and over political priorities and modes of mobilization. But they should not, in my view, be understood as constructing 'white' and 'black' women as 'essentially' fixed oppositional categories.
>
> (Brah 1996: 111)

5 Within the project report, we used the term 'minoritization' (rather than 'minority' or 'minority ethnic group') to highlight that groups and communities do not occupy the position of minority by virtue of some inherent property (of their culture or religion, for example) but rather they come to acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical and political process. This is an intentional discursive intervention whose implications we consider at some length.

6 Though I have been involved previously in documenting innovative practice around intercultural and first-language psychotherapy provision (see Walker et al. 2002; Burman et al. 2003; Gowrisunkur et al. 2002).

7 In the UK context this particularly applies to Muslim women and also to some women of African descent. Of course many feminist analyses would point out that all communities and cultures work and, according to some perspectives, are organized around the control and regulation of women's sexuality and reproduction.

8 Clearly this analysis of 'race anxiety' could be elaborated further in relation to more general psychoanalytic discussions of anxiety. It is significant that anxiety, with both its phobic and neurotic features, stands on the threshold between actual neuroses and psychoneuroses. The more phobic aspects link with hysterical conversion in a way that resonates politically with the reification and commodification of racialized and gendered differences. The more obsessional compulsive features highlight something of the culturally constituted defence against discovering that, even when one has tried so hard not to be, one always finds that one has been and is – racist.

9 Here Rich writes of the 'dead weight which can be felt in many discussion of racism in the white feminist movement, a stale and stifling smell, the presence of guilt and self-hatred. I believe that black feminists recognise the uselessness, the stagnancy, of those emotions' (1975: 301).

10 Here we might wonder what this says about the role of anxiety as an index of accorded importance.

11 It is worth noting here that there is nothing new about this phenomenon in the sense that the Irish and Jewish participants in our study indicated similar issues, and their reservations were attributed to longstanding memories – including from their parents and other family members – of encountering racism when seeking service support.

12 If indeed the woman was willing to go there at all – within our (2002) study some culturally specific mental health services claimed never to have encountered issues of attempted suicide and self-harm.

13 Women's refuges in Britain are largely affiliated to the national Women's Aid Federation, although there are some autonomous refuges working as part of other projects. Women's Aid and especially other black feminist campaigning groups, such as Imkaan (linked to the Newham Asian Women's Project), have been drawing attention to this problem of 'no recourse to public funds'. However, so far it seems that it has largely been the (disproportionately fewer and under-resourced) black-identified refuges that have been accepting women with 'no recourse'.

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