

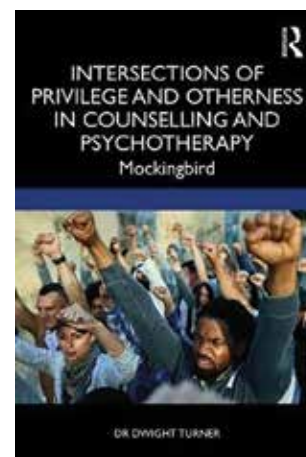
Intersections of privilege and otherness in counselling and psychotherapy: Mockingbird

by Dwight Turner

Taylor & Francis Group, 2021

REVIEW BY STEPHANI STEPHENS

Intersections of privilege and otherness in counselling and psychotherapy: Mockingbird is researched and written by a Black, English psychotherapist and there is much here for the Australian practitioner. The author's impressive treatment of the complexities around privilege and otherness is particularly notable. This work meets a need in current discussions around race, gender, ability and presents ways that therapists can better meet client needs.



Far apart from the theoretical discussions on privilege and intersectionality, Turner's real project is to interrogate the tensions of 'otherness' as it relates to clients as well as to the role of the psychotherapist. While guiding the reader to reframe 'othering' as an all-too-common social dynamic, the author highlights material stemming from self-reflection around the roles he, and all of us, play.

An important theme, foundational to the book, is how intersectionality informs our operational supremacy as othering. In his introduction, he writes:

I am a black, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, academic, psychotherapist, and I live and work in the United Kingdom. These 19 words make up some of the aspects of who I am. They show...the aspects of my intersectional identity (p.1).

Turner does great service to the ideas of difference and how we move through the world mostly unconscious of the small relational adjustments we make. The reference to his own identifiers prompts us as therapists to reflect on how we move through our personal and professional worlds and the small conscious and unconscious adjustments we make to maintain an equilibrium when confronted with others.

This begs the question: "are we occupiers of supremacy and therefore inherently engaged in othering, or are we occupying spaces of being othered?" As Turner points out, we "forget that we hold both certain privileges and positions of otherness all the time" (p. 39). Supremacy, he suggests, is such an inherent structure in our daily encounters that "because we are so immersed within the intersectional world of privilege, we very rarely recognise the unconscious supremacist within us all when it happens" (p. 37). This he raises not to be alarmist but rather to stress the professional inquiry necessary to grapple with ourselves when clients present in therapy with stories of difference.

He goes onto explain the deep dynamic at play here:

We perform, we put on a mask, we shuck and jive, we pretend, so we are not too loud, too angry, too gay, too female, too old, or appear disabled to such an extent that we 'frighten' those in front of us into some form of ableist fragility. In order to survive, we become a fantasy of what we think the world needs us to be in order for us to get through our daily existences without fear of attack, vilification, or retribution (p. 79).

This is provocative material, meant for those willing to interrogate their own privilege, otherness, shame and even hate. Turner uses each of these themes to construct a view of his clients' and his own experiences of being othered.

One significant contribution here is to present the case that othering is a built-in dynamic of living in society, in culture and with one another and that to raise our awareness of the subtleties of this power dynamic enables us to unravel it for ourselves and our clients. That is, to commit to becoming conscious of it is the first step to being able to be present with it and with our wounded clients.

The book's exploration serves as its own caveat to the reader. If psychotherapists do not consciously make the effort to examine and also to explore our own objectifications, then we fall complicit to compounding the same stereotypes that clients might want to challenge when they come to therapy. In this respect, Turner offers a rigorous dissection of the psychodynamic in action when feelings of superiority and shame intersect, resulting in recognition of both the othered and the supremacist.

Through the examination of the roles of shame and hatred and how they operate in everyone who has been othered is important content. He describes how countertransference alerted him to the moment when supremacy enters the therapeutic space. He recounts:

...when I myself am working with clients who have experienced this sense of othering, then often what enters the room unconsciously is a sense of either shame that I myself, the therapist, am not measuring up to them in some fashion, or I endure their hatred because of the narcissistic defence they had built around them in order to survive (p. 65).

This attentiveness Turner shows is painstaking work that requires deep care and attention to the dyad as well as to the general psychological hygiene of the practitioner. He further develops the understanding of how hatred and shame are projected and goes on to develop the role of the death instinct. Suffering otherness, he explains, is its own type of intricate death. "The death drive is therefore so incredibly common within all of us that often [we] do not even realise we are dying, or destroying, ourselves so regularly" (p. 83). The example he gives is the Ghanaian client whose struggles to land a job interview were successful only after she altered her name on her application. Turner defines this act as "the killing off of that which makes us the other" (p. 79).

One of the most important parts of Turner's book is when he directs awareness of his own intersectionality onto the profession itself. He explains:

So, instead of actually challenging the psychological traumas experienced by those who are the other...counselling and psychotherapy trainings therefore overtly re-enact the annihilation of the other by not more actively including explorations of otherness and privilege in their curriculums, both overtly in the marginalisation, or the tokenism of the exploration... or more covertly, by the conscious lack of interest in the experiences of their non-white, non-heterosexual, non-able-bodied students.

Important here is Turner's willingness to identify this professional blindness in training psychotherapists, many of whom will be needed to engage with otherness either as diverse therapists themselves or for diverse clients.

Although not explicitly named, the wounded healer appears when Turner shares his own moving journey as a psychoanalytic trainee. His journal entries of dreams, observations and impressions from his own supervision offer us an intimate view into the making of a psychoanalyst, a rich insight into a therapist and Black man committed to understanding the pain of being other in a privileged world. And although Turner's theoretical and case discussions are superb and make for necessary psychoanalytic research, his bravery to invite readers into his own process is what Jungians might call sharing the *prima materia* in the hope of arriving at the philosopher's stone. An extremely valuable contribution to the book.

The book will interest therapists and counsellors who work with diverse clients of all sorts and those interested in how their unconscious bias might play out in the therapy hour. The content will also appeal to those interested in privilege and how this looks in an era when Australia is reflecting on its own identity around the Uluru Statement from the Heart as well as examining the attachment to a Mother-land that the long alliance to the Commonwealth has afforded.

Almost one in five Australians have experienced race-hate talk (Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/no-place-racism>). There is much work to do to ensure we are ready to explicitly address otherness with our clients and have the skills to do so.