

Sarb Bajwa Chief Executive BPS
Hazel McLaughlin President BPS

Power Threat Meaning Framework
BPS DCP Subcommittee

August 3rd 2020

Dear Sarb and Hazel,

Like everyone, we have been shocked and deeply saddened by the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery in the USA and the institutional racism this has highlighted both in USA and the UK. During the pandemic lockdown we know that young black men in London were more than 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police and more than a quarter of all black 15 - to 24-year-olds in London were stopped and searched during this period. Black people in the UK are, as we know, 8 times more likely to be Tasered by police. This racial profiling leads to the experience that 'just being Black' in Britain is a crime. We know too that Black men are over-represented in the criminal justice system and in secure mental health services and are more likely to be sectioned. Black women and girls are less likely to access mental services despite suffering higher rates of violence and abuse. The current COVID-19 pandemic has exposed profound and severe health consequences for Black and Asian communities which reflect racial inequalities in employment, income, housing and access to health services.

This highlighting of long standing structural racial injustices in the UK requires immediate action.

Within the profession and practice of Psychology in the UK there are many areas that have been identified as requiring urgent attention : the whitewashed Eurocentric psychology curriculum in undergraduate and post graduate courses; the unequal access to allied professional post graduate training courses; the white privilege within psychology professions which disadvantages Black and Asian people in recruitment and career advancement; the processes of white power and privilege within the BPS itself .

The Power Threat Meaning Framework <https://www.bps.org.uk/power-threat-meaning-framework> we believe offers an important resource for Psychology to locate, formulate and act on power abuses that lead to individual, family, group and community distress. This is of urgent importance for our time now, for addressing the deep inequalities of racism, poverty, gender, class, sexual identity and age within our society.

The Power Threat Meaning Framework, we suggest, is also a resource for thinking about the role of power, especially ideological power, in the production and dissemination of psychological knowledge. This includes White Psychology's role in producing 'knowledge' about non-White people and in producing and supporting individualised accounts of distress which especially disadvantage these groups. The Framework draws on a wide range of research and scholarship, much of it from outside Psychology, in exploring these issues. We believe a wider focus on power and knowledge creation is essential if fundamental and lasting change is to be achieved rather than, for example, simply adding modules to existing curricula or making existing mental health services 'more accessible' to Black and other minority ethnic people.

Within the BPS DCP Power Threat Meaning Framework subcommittee, we are conscious of the work we have to do to address racial injustices within our own work. The PTMF locates the understanding of how power operates and the negative operation of power at its core. We cannot therefore feel any comfort that our subcommittee is still largely of people of white heritage. We are aware that racial and intersecting inequalities need to be highlighted as we address the implementation of the PTM Framework in practice across the UK and globally. We need to ensure that the training and practice of the PTM Framework have a rightful focus on the intersectional power abuses of race, gender, sexual identity, class and age and ability. Towards this we are :

- committed to increasing the presence of Black and BAME psychologists on the PTMF subcommittee. We are linking with Black Psychologists and BAME psychology networks to do so.
- adding Anti-racist resources, articles, podcasts blogs and writings to the PTMF website as an ongoing resource for both 'unlearning' and re learning.
- ensuring that our training events include a central focus on intersectional power processes impacting on the lives of Black and BAME women, men and families.

These are initial but essential acts at this moment.

As a BPS subcommittee we are very aware of the public profile of Psychology in the UK and that the BPS has both the responsibility and the opportunity to speak out loudly and clearly on this matter. We are aware that the BPS and the DCP Representative Assembly put out statements responding to the death of George Floyd and that you Sarb have addressed racism within the BPS in your post Conference blog. The recent position paper from the DCP Racial and Social Inequalities in the Times of Covid-19 working group is very welcome.

What we feel is additionally urgently needed from the BPS is a public statement that establishes with certainty that the BPS condemns racial violence, racial profiling and racial injustices in Britain and globally and that the BPS :

- is committed to addressing racism and racial injustices within the UK
- is committed to addressing racism within the BPS and the profession of Psychology
- acknowledges the need for action and accountability to tackle white privilege within the BPS and Psychology profession and to promote racial equality through:
 - urgently working with Universities to decolonise the Eurocentric Undergraduate and Post graduate Psychology curriculum This needs to include critical awareness about the use of decontextualized, individualising and pathologising language, both psychological (eg 'Abnormal Psychology') and psychiatric.
 - urgently working with the BPS Divisions to decolonise Allied Professional Psychology Training Courses, address white privilege within selection procedures and white privilege within the professions
 - ensure Black Psychologists are present at all levels of the BPS – on the Board, Executive committee, on all committees, special interest groups, sub committees and working groups.
 - actively promote the voices of Black Psychologists and Asian and Minority Ethnic Psychologists within Psychology and Psychology professions.

The BPS is viewed as a largely whitewashed organisation with little relevance to many Black Psychologists. Indeed, as you have acknowledged, many see it as a racist organisation and profession, with institutionalised white privilege and power.

The BPS is in a position of leadership to make a difference to this now. We strongly urge that a public statement from the BPS, press released and kept on the front of the BPS website, would begin this public commitment to addressing racism within the Psychology and the BPS that is so urgently required. This statement could link to an ongoing web site window for Black Lives Matter/Anti-Racist practice on the public front page of the BPS website with access to position papers, resources and articles including readers views, and to updates on changes being made by the BPS to curriculum, selection, and institutional barriers to racial equality. It could also update on the work and time frame of the Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce. What Black Lives Matters has already taught us is that it is action and accountability that count, not words alone.

Change within the BPS and Psychology requires centering Black Psychologists in this process. There are many people to learn from including the BPS Black and Asian Counselling Psychologists Group, BACPG, the BPS Minorities Group, within applied Psychology professions, University departments and related organisations including the Black, African and Asian Therapy Network BAATN <https://www.baatn.org.uk/> . BME in Psychiatry and Psychology Network @BIPPNetwork ; BME Voices ,<http://www.bmevoices.co.uk/> ; Breaking Mad [@TeamBreakingMad](#) ; Time To Talk Black : [@TimetoTalkBlack](#).

These are not easy changes to make. We would welcome discussion on how we can support each other in urgently taking these rightful and overdue actions.

We look forward to discussing this with you.

With good wishes,

Jan Bostock and Gilli Watson

Co-Chairs

On behalf of the BPS DCP Power Threat Meaning Framework subcommittee