

...with Gail Coleman

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One moment that changed the course of your career

Working for the award-winning service Building Bridges in Liverpool, a community-based NHS service specialising in the emotional well being of Black and Minority Ethnic children and their families in Merseyside. Being part of this service strengthened my view that it is often not the communities that are hard to reach, it is actually more often mainstream services that find it hard to reach out, due to the way in which services are structured.

One journal article all psychologists should read

In 1995 there was an article by Jensen in the *American Psychologist*. The article argued for racial profiling in terms of intellect and sexual activity, amongst other things. I am not sure if I would want all psychologists to read it, but it profoundly affected me. I think we need to acknowledge some of the racist roots of our profession at times, in order to move forward.

One important cultural difference in parenting

A good friend, counselling

psychologist Amira Hassan, remarked one day that she saw a young girl in a shop looking after her young sibling and thought, 'What a responsible girl'. At the same time another person in the shop walked by and commented on how irresponsible it was that the mother left the young girl to look after the child. Often, in more collective-based cultures



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having responsibility at a relatively early age is viewed positively. However at times, in more individualistic societies this is viewed as a parent being irresponsible and passing on too much responsibility to the child.

The complexity of the independent/individualistic, interdependent/collectivist cultural influence is now more fully acknowledged in clinical psychology, with regard to understanding child-rearing practices, and this is encouraging.

One thing that you would change about psychologists

'Physician heal thyself'. I would encourage us as psychologists to practise what we preach and ensure that we invest time in looking after our own emotional well-being.

One proud moment

In my role as an expert witness, after being asked to re-assess a family, I witnessed the children being reunited with their parents (across continents) after they had been separated for a number of years, with the children in long-term foster care in the UK. An emotional and humbling moment, but also a reminder that appropriately applied psychology can make a difference.

One development that has surprised you

I have been pleasantly surprised by the 'cultural

competence in CBT' literature. I am sometimes a little wary of CBT due to the focus on internal processes, with at times much less recognition of external/environmental factors, such as cultural influences or inequalities in relationships with others. However, some of the recent literature, such as Pamela Hays's *Culturally Responsive Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy* promotes good practice with regard to working with diverse communities, and again this is encouraging.

One film

This may represent my identity as a child psychologist, but I have to recommend the movie *Happy Feet*. It depicts issues of difference in such an innocent and accessible way. The Motown songs also remind me of my dad, working in the 70s as a singer. Later in life he told me what it was like working in the clubs in Manchester and the racism he faced. Obviously these are my personal associations but perhaps in its own innocent way it will trigger memories for you associated with living with difference.

One final thought

Can we, as a profession, become collectively active and make vocal psychology-based arguments with regard to the impact of social inequality and discrimination? Many of us who want this also face discrimination. We therefore have to go through our own personal journey to manage this, and at times the fight is exhausting!

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