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The Psychosis of Existential Training: Towards an Inclusive and Equitable Therapeutic Practice for Young Therapists

Abstract for

Long Presentation

Abstract

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Existential psychotherapy, a profound exploration of human existence, must transcend the constraints of a monolithic perspective on the Black experience in its training and practice. Historically framed through a predominantly Western lens, existentialism has marginalised non-Western narratives, perpetuating epistemological biases that undermine the richness of diverse existential realities. This submission challenges the misconceptions of irrelevance, fears of politicisation, resistance to expanding the canon, and the perceived universality of European existentialism. We argue for a critical understanding that restores existential practice as a universal therapeutic intervention, honouring Black existential narratives as essential to the philosophical and therapeutic discourse.

While foundational thinkers like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, and de Beauvoir offer insights into freedom, choice, and meaning, their frameworks often exclude the lived experiences of marginalised communities. We propose integrating the perspectives of Black existentialist thinkers like Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, and Lewis Gordon, whose work highlights identity, systemic oppression, and cultural trauma. These perspectives enrich the existential framework, dismantling its Eurocentric bias and creating space for genuine engagement with race, culture, and existence.

Our presentation underscores the urgency of decolonising training curricula in predominantly white institutions (PWIs), where theoretical biases often dominate. We propose a model for diversity training that equips young existential therapists with cultural competence and anti-racist frameworks. By integrating intersectionality and culturally responsive approaches, therapists can better navigate diverse client experiences and promote equity in practice.

This dialogue seeks to dismantle the categorisation of the Black experience as a subset of Western existentialism, reframing it as an equally significant narrative. Reimagining existentialism through this lens ensures a more inclusive and equitable psychotherapeutic practice, affirming the universality and diversity of human existence.

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