

Decolonising the psychology curriculum: How does that make you feel?

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By Sarah Atayero (BA, MSc)



Sarah Atayero

- Black-British Nigerian
- Trainee Clinical Psychologist at Royal Holloway University
- Director at the Black and Minority Ethnicity in Psychiatry & Psychology Network (BiPP Network)
- Anti-racist decolonial practitioner



Sarah.atayero@live.co.uk
Info@bippnetwork.org.uk



@sarahatayero
@BIPPNetwork

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Overview

What is decolonisation?

- Developing a shared language
- Difference between diversity/inclusion

Why is this needed?

- Psychology's racist history
- The zeitgeist, the specification and compassion

Decolonising the curriculum

- Good practice examples

Anti-racist practice – disrupting the 'under achievement' trajectory

- Teacher training

Q&A

Compassion

*“a **sensitivity** to the suffering of self and others (and the causes of that suffering) with a **deep commitment** to relieve it, prevent it from returning and **promote wellbeing**.”*

Hewitt & Irons (2015)

What is decolonisation and why does everyone keep saying it?



Different definitions...

- *The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent. - Wikipedia*
- *The freeing of minds from colonial ideology' in particular by addressing the ingrained idea that to be colonised was to be inferior. – Education Studies Department, University of Warwick*
- *The effort to interrogate and transform the institutional, structural and epistemological legacies of colonialism. - Decolonising SOAS*

Decolonisation is not: Diversity

“Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect for the full range of human characteristics in their socioecological, historical, and cultural contexts, as well as understanding that each individual, family, community, and societal group has uniqueness that make them different from others.”

Accessed from: <https://www.communitypsychology.com/the-concept-of-diversity-ceras-position/#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20diversity%20encompasses,make%20them%20different%20from%20others.>

Decolonisation is not: Inclusion

“Inclusion is an organisational effort and practices in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed, and equally treated.”

Decolonisation as part of anti-racist practice

- Diversity is simply a focus on difference. It is about managing race rather than challenging racism (Ahmed 2012; Mohanty, 2003).
- Anti-racism work does more than bring people with marked/constructed differences into the same space. It asks us to question the space we are inviting people into.
- Though **racism** can be seen through the actions of individuals, racism **is not individual**, it is institutional and systemic– people work within institutions and are a part of those systems.

	Definition	Questions asked by those in power	How it is received by marginalised groups
Diversity	Representation	“Who’s in the room?”	You want me but not my input
Inclusion	Including marginalised groups in existing structures	“Has everyone’s ideas been heard?” “Does everyone feel like they belong?”	Including me in a historically violent and colonial context, an environment not made for me
Decolonisation	Interrogating, dismantling and transforming institutional legacies of colonialism	“How has this system been built to oppress marginalised groups?” “How can we dismantle this system?”	You’re working with me to disrupt the existing problematic systems, and together build a better future for everyone.

Other important terms

Race is a social construct.

People of the Global Majority (PoGM) refers to Black, Asian and other non-White ethnic groups.

Allyship an ally is any person that actively promotes and aspires to advance the culture of inclusion through intentional, positive and conscious efforts that benefit people as a whole.

Power is the ability or capacity to (1) do something or act in a particular way. (2) to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events. Authority that is given or delegated to a person or body.

Oppression is the unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power.

White supremacy is the belief that the white race is inherently superior to other races and that white people should have control over people of other races. It is the social, economic, and political systems that collectively enable white people to maintain power over people of other races.

Why is decolonisation in psychology needed?
We're good people!

The world right now....

Met police officer faces new hearing over death of mentally ill black man

Black Lives Matter

Black people are 4xs more likely to be sectioned under the MHA and be arrested under s136

Race report: 'UK not deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities'

I can't breathe

COVID-19

21% of all healthcare staff are PoGM.
63% of staff who died were PoGM

George Nkencho, a 27-year-old Nigerian man with mental health issues shot by police

Psychology's racist **history**, present and future

(if we do nothing)

- Racist and colonial history of scientific inquiry
- Early psychologists involved in psychometric testing and the quantitative study of intelligence, such as Spearman, Pearson and Thorndike, were prominent members of several eugenicist groups like the Eugenics Education Society.
- Wechsler stated that due to their omission in the normalisation sample the test could not be used for 'the colored population of the United States' for the measurement of intelligence.

Scientific racism still exists today

“The idea that certain races are inherently more intelligent than others is being trumpeted by a small group of anthropologists, IQ researchers, psychologists and pundits who portray themselves as noble dissidents, standing up for inconvenient facts.”

Gavin Evans (2018) **The unwelcome revival of ‘race science’**

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/02/the-unwelcome-revival-of-race-science>

An example from modern day research – The Welfare Trait

- ‘Welfare dependency can be bred out’ – Dr Adam Perkins, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King’s College London

Psychology's racist history, present and future

(if we do nothing)

- The specification
 - Approaches – alternative 'approaches' to studying psychology
 - Psychopathology – 'cultural effects' and reliability of schizophrenia diagnosis, contribution of non-Western therapies
 - Research methods – the WEIRD(est) people in the world (Arnett, 2008)
 - Only mention of racism in psychology curricula is in social psychology and it is individualised and reduced to prejudice

Pedagogy in Psychology

- Objectivity
- Individualism
- Nomothetic

Psychology's racist history, present and future

(if we do nothing)

- Attainment gap at A-Levels and university of PoGM students
 - Black students' UCAS applications more likely to have their applications flagged and 'fact checked' for fraud or errors.
 - PoGM university students less likely to graduate with 1st or 2:1 compared to white peers with the same A-Level grades.

“The outcomes you get from any system are precisely the outcomes the system is designed to give you”

Psychology's racist history, present and future

(if we do nothing)

- Takes too long from theory to practice and we're running out of time
 - It takes on average 17 years for research evidence to be translated into clinical practice (Green et al., 2009; Morris, Wooding & Grant, 2011)
- Debate is not a response to racism
 - Transformative works needs to be done and this can come directly from clinical practice

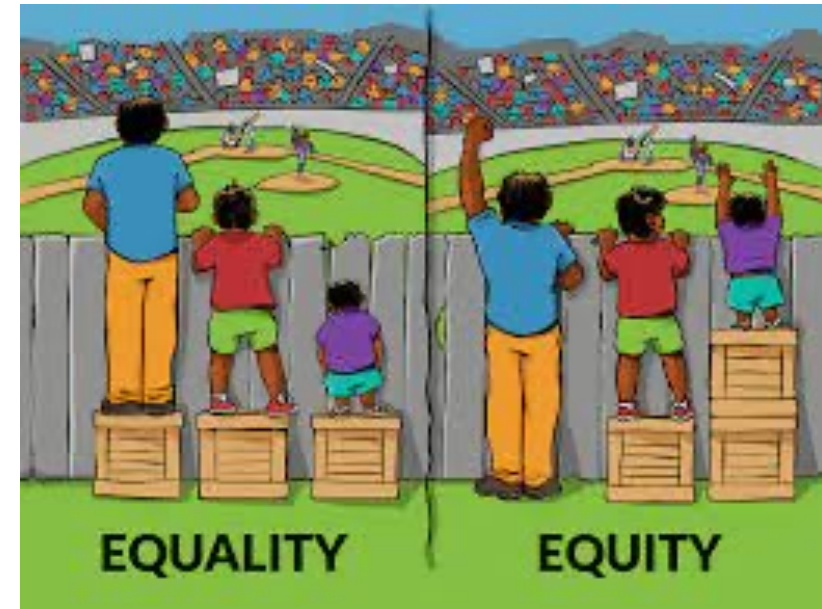
Decolonising the curriculum

Good Practice Examples

#RhodesMustFall

#WhyisMyCurriculumWhite

HEE and Clinical Psychology



Guiding students

- What happens to the student when they do not hear their voice at all, or when they do, it is glossed over or framed as a negative?
- Does the student have the confidence to start being critical on a topic they are just starting to understand; and how will it be perceived by the academic and other students?
- Why should the task of diversifying the voices included in the curricula rest on the shoulders of students who are marginalized or other?

What can we do as educators to decolonise psychology?



Tell the truth!

Use WEIRD already

Challenge examboards

Talk about WEIRD in psychological research

Change the curriculum

More ethnicities as teachers

Lobby the exam boards to change the curriculum

Dialogue with students about the issues

Challenge theories

What can we do as educators to decolonise psychology?



Do research ourselves

Don't be afraid to challenge

Teach them about alternative explanations to use for evaluation

To encourage students to think and talk about areas that represent weird

Challenge theories and research - with reference to WEIRD

Ask students about their experiences and ideas

Encourage students to voice their criticisms

We can talk about racism and not gloss over it by using other words. We can encourage critical thinking around WEIRD and create a safe space to talk. We can lead the debate!

Educate ourselves, question, seek out alternatives, speak to your students, providing access to alternative sources

What can we do as educators to decolonise psychology?



Encourage critical thinking and questioning surrounding the specification and research shared. Be honest about the problems, don't just brush over them

Teach pupils to think critically

Educate ourselves

Ask about their experience

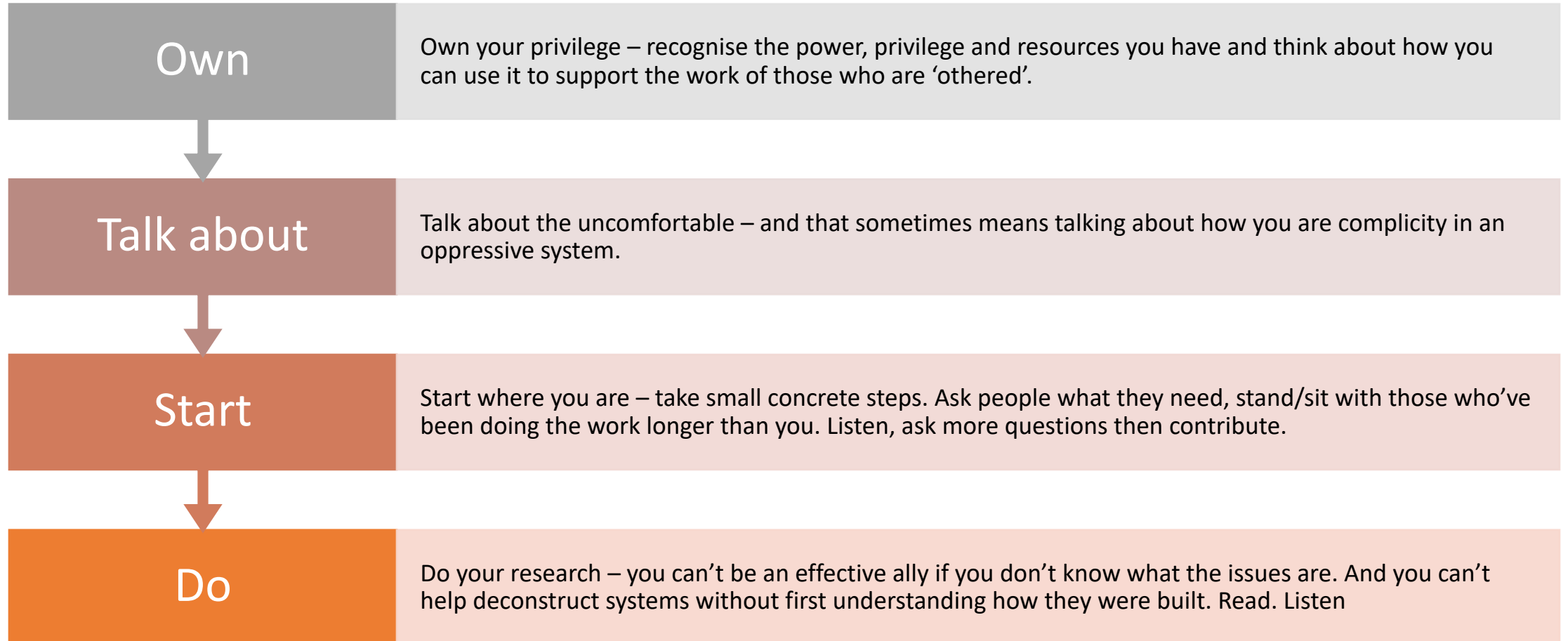
Find studies from outside of the curriculum which are more global

Providing a safe environment for pupils to challenge research

Model humility in the process

Tell AQA to be more inclusive

Notice boards



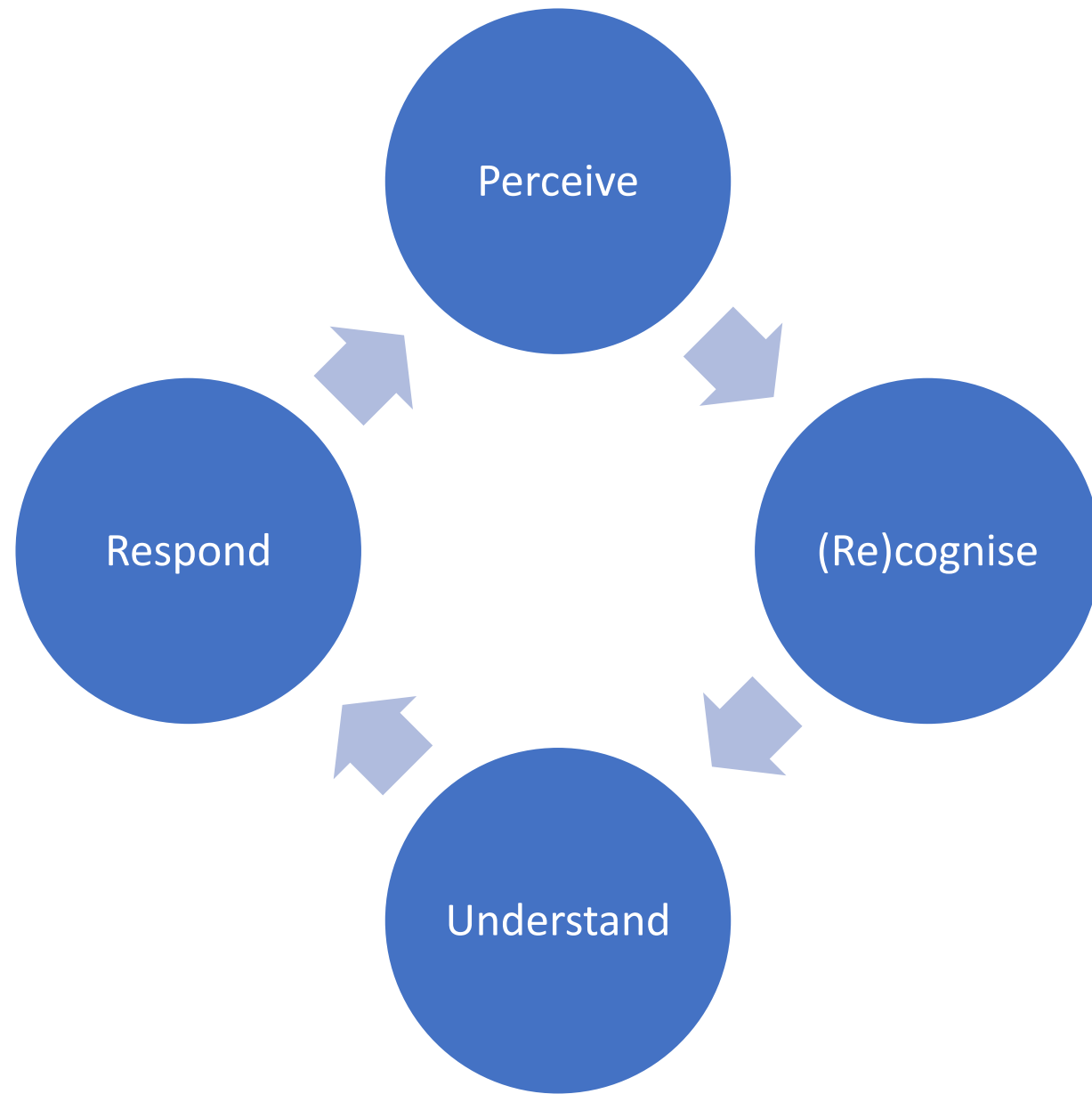
Where to start?

- Identify the problem generally and within your curriculum
- Access existing resources
- Take action rather than just talking about it
- Consider the power that funding sources and publications have – whose voice is not represented?
- Tell students why you selected the materials for class, otherwise the assumptions that this is the most important or all there is
- Embrace difficult dialogue and interpersonal challenges
- Incorporate inclusive practices and call out oppression

Curriculum Mapping

Where in the curriculum do your students learn:

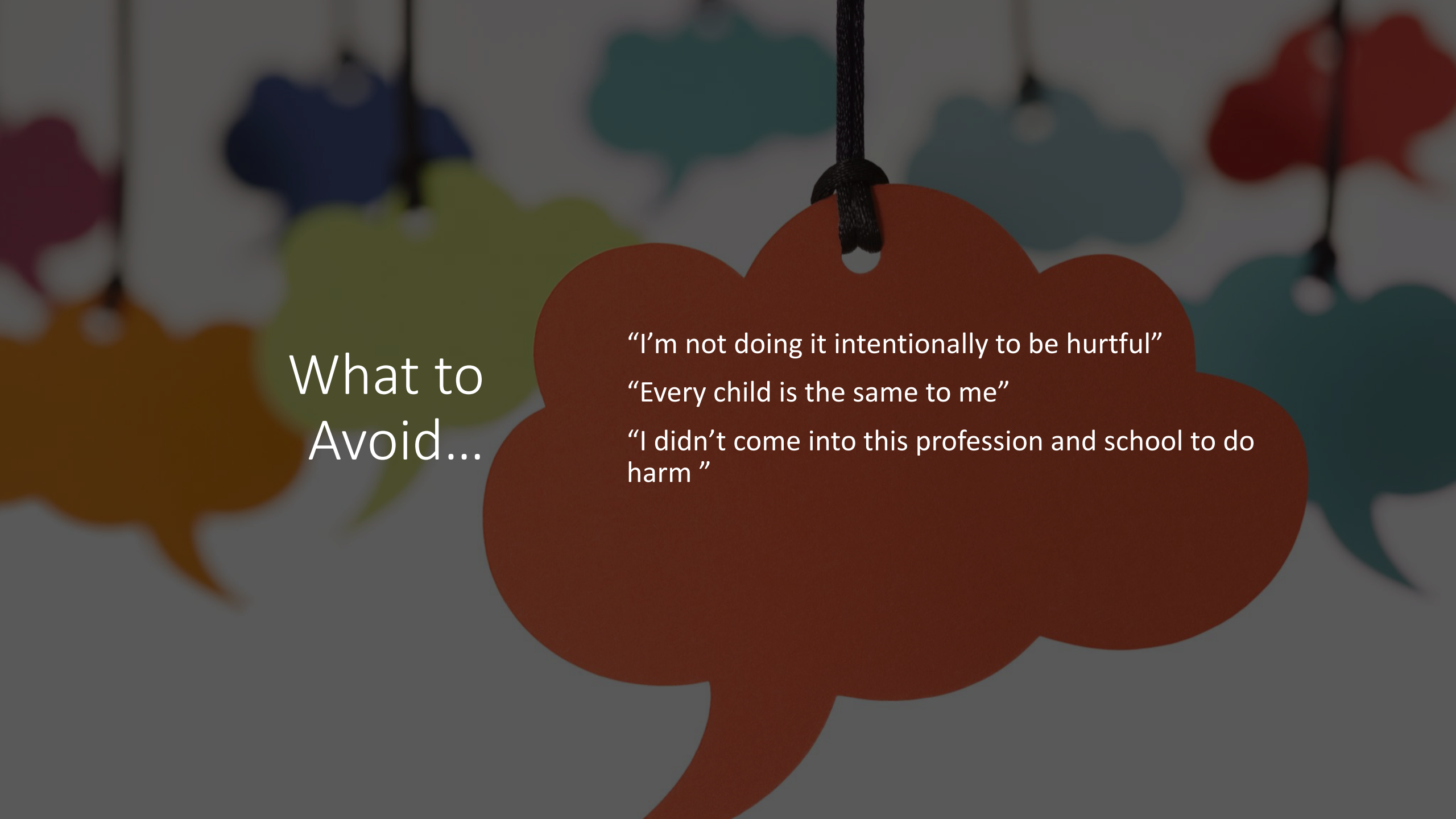
- A **history of psychology** that acknowledges contributions to capitalism and oppression
- To examine the ways in which **colonization established social hierarchies** that affect psychological science today
- To understand the influence of how the structure of **humanity influences research**, teaching, and practice
- Varied methodologies rooted in **diverse theories**
- To **interrogate the psychology of individuals** in concert with the social, historical and economic context
- **Psychology's role** in dismantling oppression
- To perceive, (re)cognize, understand, and respond to power and privilege in psychology





Wider systemic level

- Governing bodies and strategic intent
- Disrupting the 'underachievement' trajectory
- The importance of 'micro-encounters' and conversation
- Support outside of the classroom
- Teacher training
 - Not 'adding' community of voices, but recognising that they already exist

The background features a soft-focus pattern of autumn leaves in shades of blue, green, orange, and red. A large, dark brown speech bubble is positioned on the right side, containing three lines of white text. A black cord is visible at the top of the bubble, suggesting it is hanging.

What to
Avoid...

“I’m not doing it intentionally to be hurtful”

“Every child is the same to me”

“I didn’t come into this profession and school to do harm ”

What can make this difficult?

- Teachers can be racist
- We work within instructionally racist structures
- Going into the classroom with less knowledge because you're going through a process of unlearning.

Summary

- Only when we can together see racism for what it is, and make sense of the dynamics, can we do the work of disrupting and dismantling it, in order to build new connections.
- Moving from a non-validation of racism to accepting that it is there, and that people would have brought with them their own personal histories and the impact this has.
- A decolonised perspective assumes socio-political, historical and cultural contexts influence individuals and communities – to ignore these contexts risks producing and teaching fragmented knowledge that is not applicable to diverse people in the contexts of their lives.
- Help students to develop the skills to question research findings and what they're learning as research is often presented as if attitudes, beliefs and values had no influence.

Resources

- **Decolonising the curriculum webinar** by the British Psychological Society:
<https://www.bps.org.uk/about-us/diversity-and-inclusion/taskforce/webinars>
- **Decolonizing the Psychology Curriculum: Selected Resources** compiled by Dr Jasmine Mena: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g6B4ivjSrB3-CWPdqAl9lCzpjY4IJ8aws0iodKBjY/edit>
- **Keele Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum**
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/equalityframeworksandactivities/equalityawardsandreports/equalityawards/raceequalitycharter/keeledecolonisingthecurriculumnetwork/#keele-manifesto-for-decolonising-the-curriculum>
- **MA Education Consultancy** by Dr Muna Abdi <https://ma-consultancy.co.uk/>
- **“Why is My Curriculum White?”** film by National Union of Students.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dscx4h2l-Pk>
- **Rhodes Must Fall at Oxford** <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFallOxford/>

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Questions?

Thank you!



@sarahatayero
@BIPPNetwork



Sarah.atayero@live.co.uk
Info@bippnetwork.org.uk