

My Psychotherapy Career: Working to create psychotherapeutically and racially informed organisations

With UKCP psychotherapist Hendrix Hammond

Jenna

Hello, and welcome to My Psychotherapy Career, a podcast where we explore the different therapeutic settings our members working and how they came into their career. I'm Jenna Rashid, the digital engagement officer at UKCP. Our host, Helen Willingham, is the head of content and engagement at UKCP. Overseeing all our communications to members and the public, as well as our policy and research work.

In this episode, Helen speaks to UKCP psychotherapist Hendrix Hammond. As a family and systemic psychotherapist, Hendrix works with individuals, children, adolescents, couples and families in his private practice. Alongside this work, Hendrix is the founder of his own consultancy firm, Conversational Partners, where he offers workshops, coaching sessions and organisational consultancy to executive leaders. Through this work, Hendrix seeks to support organisations in developing a more inclusive and diverse work environment.

In this episode, Helen speaks to Hendrix to find out about his work supporting organisations to create a more culturally informed environment.

Helen

Really, I just want to say thank you for joining me today, Hendrix, it's really good speak to you. My first question, a big question: why did you become a psychotherapist? And what prompted you to begin training?

Hendrix

Yeah, that's a really good question. Erm, so I started my journey in my undergraduate. I did a psychology degree because I was always very interested in people. I was very curious about people, how people have thought, how people acted, how they interacted, so I decided to go to university and do an undergraduate in psychology and social anthropology. And that kind of allowed me to kind of immerse myself in theory, understanding about all these concepts that help make sense for me about interactions. And I came from a family where we weren't very good [at] doing a lot of talking in the family. And I would notice things, and I would be just such a curious child, but often would get that kind of response from parents, like you don't ask questions. You just kind of went on, got along with what the adults wanted.

It was very common for us in our family growing up, where we've had different kind of residents of the care home, in our home. And I think that was a really lovely experience for us as children, seeing the care my mom gave to these kinds of vulnerable adults, but also the support they also needed. So, I think it's in my blood.

My family's originally from West Africa and... My mum would kind of have everyone in the house, everywhere, in the house. So, it was really interesting to seeing the kind of mix of culture in my household and seeing how we did things culturally, but seeing how other people did things. And it was just really quite normal to have a variety of people in the home. And I would often listen out to the conversations when I know that I shouldn't have, as a child, to know what they were talking about. And I really wanted to be downstairs, rather than being up in my room, just having these conversations about culture, about kind of ideas around beliefs. And, what I've recognised is there is a need for people to feel cared for. There's a need for people to be held in mind, the need for people to have a sense of community. And that's what's really driven me. I didn't really know, that was driving me when I was doing my undergraduate. But as I've kind of gotten into the field and doing the work I do, I've really made connections [that] there's always been a reason why I've been on this journey.

Helen

And what does being a UKCP members mean to you?

Hendrix

So, I think, again, community. I think UKCP has offered me an opportunity to belong to a community body, with my peers. It's really nice to get kind of updates from your newsletters and what's going on the AGMs and actively invite people to participate in creating a culture of UKCP. And thinking about the practice and thinking about how we work ethically, regardless of what context we're in, whether it's health or in private practice or in charity sectors. So, I've really enjoyed being connected.

I think it's really important for me to have, and I think important also for people who I supervise, because I'm also a supervisor, to have a governing body, that kind of ensures that we're working ethically. And working to values that are, kind of, keeping the service users or clients in the centre of our work. Because when we don't do that, I think then there could be slippage into bad practice or blurring of boundaries. So, it's really important to kind of hold our ethics in the centre and ensuring that client groups that we work with are getting the best type of support that they can get.

Helen

That's great, thank you. And now I want to talk a bit more about your work that you do. And one of the areas is private practice. What prompted you to set up in private practice?

Hendrix

It wasn't intentional, I fell into it. So, I qualified 11 years ago, and at the time I was working in children's social care. I worked in a youth offending service at the time. And a colleague of mine had kind of recommended me to a friend who was having some problems with her adult daughter. When I got approached, it was like, oh, okay, I'm qualified. So, UKCP really helped me to think about insurance, and ensuring that I can find an appropriate supervisor, and thinking about actually contracts and kind of just the components to private practice. And it started from there. So, I think initially, it was a slow process. I now have a small private practice, and it's been quite successful.

Helen

You work with organisations and offer workshops on diversity; can you tell us a bit about this?

Hendrix

So, that kind of emerged from a few years ago, when we're all in the pandemic, and George Floyd's murder happened. The killing happened in America, and the ripple effect of what happened, globally, nationally, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, meant there was a lot more attention being paid to the global majority's experience and ensuring that there's more equity in the way that organisations and businesses ran, and wanting to be more ethical about the hiring practices, promotional practices, how they interact with a diverse group of staff members.

So, there was a couple of companies that had reached out to me. And I had previously worked at the Institution of Family Therapy as the course chair. So, I ran a number of courses there. And one of the tenets of systemic practice in which I'm trained in, is to think about difference. So, we're often thinking about difference in relation not just to ethnicity, race, but in terms of gender, class, sexual orientation. So, we're often thinking about difference, but not just relation to just difference, but also in relation to sameness. I've done a lot of thinking on the subject, do lots of reading on the subject. I teach lectures on the subject matter. So, I started running these workshops on anti-racist approaches in work contexts, thinking about the challenges of having a diverse workforce. What gets in the way of certain conversations. And just thinking about feelings and anxieties that people hold in relation to talking about the subject matter. And I just started to kind of run these for a number of different organisations, some in health, some private sectors, some globally, some charities, and some therapeutic services as well. So, people have kind of heard about what I do, and they wanted more of it. Because I think there's a real need. And what I noticed is, through delivering these workshops, at the end of the day, people often say we need more spaces like this. Because it can often not feel very safe to have conversations about difference. Because people can often experience being polarised over taking a position for or against something. It can often feel there's not enough space for nuance, or for dialogue. And I think our systems, unfortunately, particularly social media are set up to kind of just have these binary statements where people are having opinions about something and are talking to people but not talking with them. So, people are in monologue, but not in dialogue with people. And that's again, a big tenet of my training is how do we create more dialogue in the way that we are with each other, in the way we understand the other, and the way that we understand ourselves. So, I've just brought that into my training, creating more space for dialogue.

Helen

That's really great. And actually, you're now completing a doctorate, aren't you, in organisational consultancy? How is this helping with your psychotherapeutic work?

Hendrix

I feel like I'm a jack of all trades. I've taken on lots of different interests. And I love that, and I love what I do, I love the clinical work I do. I love the supervision I do. I love the training I offer. What I am interested in, and the interest has peaked around, how organisations work more therapeutically.

I've worked with enough clients to know that their work and the conditions in work can have such an effect on their mental health, their wellbeing, their performance, how they feel like they connect and belong in an organisation or in a team. And as a systemic psychotherapist, one of the big tenets of our training is to think about how people are embedded in systems. And it's not necessarily about the problem located in the individual, maybe it's the problem in the system. So, what is it about a system that is seeing this as a problem?

So, organisations I've been doing workshops for, have often asked me back to kind of consult with them about aspects of their recruitment strategies, performances, issues with certain teams. And I'm noticing that actually, there's huge needs of understanding how people come together in groups in organisations, and how they come together in a way that makes sense for them as individuals. It helps to kind of work towards the goal of why they're employed, and it helps them to feel good about themselves while they're in their jobs.

Helen

I think you've kind of answered this a little bit, but you use the phrase jack of all trades, why is a varied workload important to you?

Hendrix

We're all more than one thing. And for me, I've often looked at psychotherapy, and the training, as a bit of an art form. There's something quite artistic about being with people, and being creative and being dynamic, and not being static. So, I just embody that in my approach to work. And I love the idea that actually no one week looks the same. I am constantly being stretched and challenged. I'm constantly wanting to prove how I practice working with people. So doing different bits of training, doing different types of activities, often helps me to become a better therapist. And I've noticed how I've developed and grown over the last decade since I've trained, and also working in different contexts has also helped. Working with some incredible therapists and incredible colleagues, has really supported me on my journey and also supervisors.

Helen

A good one to end on because it actually leads into my next question, which is what drew you to training as a supervisor?

Hendrix

So, at the time, I was teaching at the Institute of Family Therapy as the course lead. And, in my second year there, an opportunity came up for me to go into supervision and training as a supervisor. And one of the thoughts I had was, actually, if I wanted to develop how I practice, it probably is good to develop how you supervise because I think with supervising others, you have to have a real coherent sense of the models you use in your approach. And that's what I experienced on my training. It really transformed how I saw myself as a practitioner, how I practice as a practitioner. It made me stay closer to the theories and models in which I was trained in. It also helped me to kind of expand how I practice. So, I supervise a whole range of people who were integrative psychotherapist, art psychotherapist, drama psychotherapists, and not just systemic psychotherapists. So having these different supervisees from different disciplines, it helped me to kind of develop my style of practice as a supervisor, but also my clinical practice. Because I wasn't just supervising and supporting them and having oversight about their clinical work, they were also helping me understand different ways of working with people. And I think that can only strengthen your practice, in a good way.

Helen

Is there anything you wish you knew before you started psychotherapeutic training?

Hendrix

That's a good question. There's something about once you qualify, that's where the real learning starts. So going back to training, in my training, there wasn't enough around psychosexual issues. So as systemic psychotherapists, you are able to work with families and couples. So, working with couples, what I noticed when I moved into seeing clients who were couples, who were presenting with those issues, I realised that there was a limitation to my knowledge, so I had to go off and do further training.

I get that training courses can only teach so much. So, there is a need to kind of, invest in further training. But that was one area I thought, yeah, I wish we could have spent a bit more time in this area, because it's so pertinent to working with couples. Also, how to kind of set up a private practice, how to kind of deal with money, how to manage contracts. I think that could have been a really helpful approach to ensuring that people had the right type of structures underneath them to start a private practice. So, in the beginning of my private practice, there was lots of things I had to just learn through just doing. And that has developed me, sure, but I think there's certain things that could have been avoided if there was a bit more of a space provided in the training around private practice, because there is a need out there. And I think there's an increased need, that they are supported to do this in a way that is ethical, fits for them and fits for the various clients like they'll encounter. Because there's lots of things that pitfalls and hurdles to overcome, and things to be managing and thinking about when you move into practice.

Helen

Where did you find support when setting up?

Hendrix

Yeah, I think it was liaising with supervisors and experienced supervisors that had established their own private practice. I think that's really helpful. And not just talking to one person, I think, talking to different types of people, and having opportunities to help you get a sense of the landscape that is private practice, and the various forms of what the work could look like. And some of the things to avoid, certain things to hold in mind. I also found UKCP very informative. So, I think you've got a section around private practice. And I think templates around contracts, client contracts that were really helpful, and I had used them in the early stages of setting up my private practice.

And I also think it's really important to have peers around you, because private practice is quite isolating. And if you're working with a variety of different client groups, erm, ensuring that you just have spaces to reflect on the work, to think about yourself in relation to the work, to just have support from other professional peers, to help you sustain the work as well.

We're all people, and we all have our own personal lives and other things going on for us. And I think it's important to just feel held by, and I call it a community because for me for sure I have a community around me. And that makes a huge difference, its enabled me to do what I do, erm, so I've been really fortunate. And I've seen how it makes a difference.

Helen

How did you manage the logistics of training? We know that there's costs, there's time. Often, it's alongside other things like you said, we have other lives as well as our work lives and training as well. How did you manage all of the logistics when you were training?

Hendrix

Constantly juggling. I think you can't get away [from that]. If you're ever doing a counselling or psychotherapy training course, it's not going to be a walk in the park, it is going to require you to make some sacrifices, to make some judgement calls about how you use your time. I often talk about being time poor. And I'm feeling it increasingly as I do my doctorate. And that's often what can happen when you're on a training course like this. And you also need time to think and process and reflect.

So, it's kind of having conversations with my loved ones about my process and where I'm at. And again, going into dialogue about actually this is what I can do, what I can't do, managing expectations, and ensuring I have a work environment, a work structure that is supportive as well. I think that makes a huge difference.

I felt very fortunate in my start of my career, I was employed in a local authority that was investing in using systemic ideas to work with social care service users, families and children. So, my training in this modality just fitted for the organisational goal and where it was going. So, they were very supportive. So that enabled me to ensure that I was surrounded by peers that are either qualified or at different points of their training. I had a very supportive manager, very nurturing manager. And that made a huge difference for me to have the space that I needed to focus on the course but also managed to other competing demands of work and home life. And if people can kind of find those spaces where they are supported in those ways. I know it's not something that's easy to locate. I think it can make a big difference.

But you do need to kind of think about how you may need to have conversations with people in your life about their expectations of your time, and the reality of a course like this. It will draw on your time and finances as well. You need to kind of make some decisions about finances, what you can spend, what you can't spend. I spent a lot of time, yeah, needing to watch the pennies for many years, many, many years. But I had decided to make that choice. And that fitted for what I needed at the time. I know that different people have different circumstances. But there's a number of different grants and options for people to be supported. And I know at the moment with the financial crisis, it's even harder for people. But I would kind of stress, that there's always ways that we can navigate this.

Helen

Thank you, and what advice would you give to someone who's considering training as a psychotherapist or psychotherapeutic counsellor?

Hendrix

I would say, be open to learning about yourself, be open to learning about others, do more listening than talking. I think there's something about taking things in and sitting with it. Develop your network of peers around you. Get a good supervisor. If you are on a training where therapy is required, yeah, again, identify a therapist that can 'hold' you and hold the content in terms of what you're bringing of yourself, and what you're bringing to the client work. Create space in your life. Really look at how you're living, currently. You may need to kind of limit how much time you're spending with other activities so that you can focus on a training like this. Because with the training itself, there will be some bumps in the road, some pitfalls, some great learning curves. But you need to give yourself the space to be able to go through that process and trust the process because it is a process. And you will come out the other end a very different person. So, I would say trust the process.

Helen

And you said there, you will come out a very different person. How did training change you?

Hendrix

That's a huge question. How did it change me? I think for me, I had better insight about self. And that's the

other thing that the trainings taught me, that the learning doesn't stop. We all come into the world developing a sense of what we know and what we don't know. And what the training has opened up is that how I understood myself and others was limited before I did training.

And how the training has supported me, is to have an awareness of the complexity of the human – human mind, human emotion, how we do relationships, in all forms, in all contexts and how layered it is. And what I then take forward is more compassion, in relation to myself and others, relationships, more understanding, more thoughtfulness, more reflection, greater sense of curiosity about myself and other people, and about the world around us. And that has kind of transformed the relationships around me.

I'm just more curious about people, as a whole, and curious about situations and not quick to go to judgement or take a strong position on things. So, I allow myself to be tentative and think what else is there, what am I not seeing? How can I better understand this? That, for me, enables me to be in the world.

Helen

I think that's a really lovely note to end on. And it really comes across how much you love what you do, Hendrix, so it's been really great to talk to you today. So, thank you very much for that.

Hendrix

You're welcome.

Jenna

That was UKCP psychotherapist Hendrix Hammond speaking to Helen Willingham are head of content and engagement.

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