

## **We stand in solidarity with Black people and believe that Black lives really do matter**

In May 2020 we all witnessed the trauma of yet another black man being killed by American police officers. George Floyd's murder highlighted issues of underlying systemic inequities, the collective trauma and the lived experience of black people in America, the UK and all over the world and in countries where black people are in the minority. In 2020 there were many commendable statements of outrage, solidarity and condemnation from big brands including Ben & Jerry's, Apple and Amazon, but in alarming contrast there was complete silence from most corporate organisations in the UK, some of which are global, multinational organisations with multicultural staff. This is sadly unsurprising and speaks volumes; highlighting a wider and more systemic problem, the issue of modern racism in the workplace.

The Black Business Psychology Network was created to address the issues of racism, discrimination, elitism and inequality within the field of occupational psychology. Our network of black psychologists had to create a safe space for ourselves because we have collectively experienced racism and discrimination, in a field that serves global multicultural organisations and users of psychological services. Yet, is comprised of predominantly white chartered and clinical psychologists and large junior and non-white psychologists. Over the last few years we have engaged in several cross-network meetings and discussions with our members and wider networks about the issues black people in the workplace are facing, the lack of support and resources available. During these meetings it was found that unsurprisingly many are dealing with increased racism, discrimination and micro-aggressions every day at work.

Add to that, the fear of unemployment, inconvenience, loss of income and direct suffering due to Covid-19; and we are seeing a huge impact on the well-being of black employees with a complete disregard for within the workplace. Many continue with professionalism and their composure despite enduring the extreme psychological effects of the racism. This will only get worse because of the unwillingness of employees to really acknowledge and tackle the very real issues at hand; racism and inequality in the UK workplace.

The common rhetoric is that this is an 'American problem' and this doesn't apply to the UK. The reality being many non-black people in society, organisations and the corporate arenas are unwilling to accept that there are real issues with racism, inequality, a lack of black diversity and discrimination in the UK workplace. The continued denial by their white counterparts invalidates the lived experience of black employees. Whilst many companies posted well drafted, seemingly well intentioned statements about standing in solidarity with Black Lives Matter or being, 'passionately committed to diversity', or being 'champions of diversity; the statements have no real actionable transparent steps behind them to tackle the issues and with no or very little black staff members in their teams it seems even more of an empty statement. You only need to look at the abundance of resources and support available to deal with issues surrounding COVID-19 and the workplace/force; but nothing on how to support black staff, dealing with racism and inequality, to illuminate how flimsy these company statements are; and the issue of racism in the UK has been an issue for hundreds of years.

Common themes have come to light, through several meetings and discussions within ours and our partner networks; these include a lack of acknowledgement from organisations that there is a problem with racism in the UK, almost zero discussion, and support for black staff within the corporate world; and daily micro-aggressions faced by black staff including the toxic cultures within some that deny racism and enable a culture of fear and persecution for speaking out about racism. Whilst the

traditionally white, UK corporate sector continues to dismiss, deny and invalidate the lived experience of black people; it is often implied implicitly within these organisations that black people or POC, should seek to work with their white counterparts to address issues of racism and inequality. This is problematic, because it is not the responsibility of black people and POC to help white people fix issues of inequality, discrimination and racism within their organisations as racism is not a problem perpetuated by black people and POC. We do, however, acknowledge that some organisations need guidance and as a wide network of black business psychologists, coaches, and extended network of psychotherapists and clinical psychologists; we are willing to consult and work with organisations who are truly committed to improving equality and diversity and support their black staff.

Our aim here is to support black business psychologists and provide them with safe spaces to discuss and be their authentic selves. We really do believe that black lives matter and are actively working to enact this in our organisation.

Written by Kaemorine Prendergast