
Gaining Ground: what's new on the CAT landscape

Friday 30 June 2023, St Thomas' Centre, Manchester

Graduating Year 2 Live Presentation Abstracts

Neurodivergence Within the Therapy Room:

CAT for Autistic People Presenting with Complex Trauma and Mental Health Difficulties

Dr James Randall, Clinical Psychologist

To be neurodivergent is to see, feel and experience the self, others and the world in ways unfamiliar to most (neurotypical) people. Understanding oneself as Autistic, for example, involves differences in communication and social interaction, which in certain contexts can enable or restrain an individual's socio-emotional engagement. Whether someone thrives, just about survives, or deteriorates, is very much contingent on how attuned others and environments can be to underlying neurodivergent needs in social, psychological and relational experiences –too often overlooked.

With a guiding value of collaboration, CAT promotes a curious therapy which should welcome neurodivergence. CAT offers communicative and interactive scaffolds in order to address relational and mental health difficulties, and the opportunity to recognise and negotiate patterns within one's life. When facing complex and developmental trauma, CAT's Multiple Self-States Model becomes extremely useful in understanding the impact on selves when a neurotypical world attempts to seep inside: from partially-dissociated states of meltdown, shutdown, or burnout, to the multiplicity of selves in plurals and alters. CAT can support neurodivergent people to reformulate and map out ways to develop, grow and change for the better in a neurotypical world that doesn't always hold you in mind.

Why Are We (Still) Talking About Race? And What Does CAT Have To Say?

Dr Margaret Gani, Consultant Psychiatrist

Race. What thoughts do this word evoke? How comfortable are we talking about Race? Does Race come up in your therapy sessions? Or does it seem like it might come up, but when it doesn't - you're relieved? Do you feel - it's a post-racial world, why do people keep bringing this up? Would you freely discuss your race-related experiences with a therapist not of your racial makeup? Race as a word is fraught with various tensions - terms used to delineate can be clumsy and unwieldy.

Can Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) help us navigate racial experiences? CAT is a collaborative therapy that helps us explore our past, understand our present, and eventually improve our future. It is a relational therapy that gives us tools, techniques and opportunities to explore things we might rather avoid.

CAT provides an avenue to name, discuss and resolve uncomfortable and unmanageable feelings and emotions. CAT can help us as therapists - whatever our race or perspective - to proactively provide safe spaces where patients can explore their own race-related uncertainties - freely and with support.

Come walk with me through a CAT based exploration of Race.

CAT and Physical Health: Research and Reflections

Dr Gemma Evans, Consultant Clinical Psychologist

As a clinical psychologist working in physical health and undertaking CAT training, I will present the relevance of CAT to physical health by overviewing the existing research and offering reflections from my own learning.

Individuals impacted by physical health difficulties may seek emotional support for various reasons. Some may have several longstanding sources of distress in their lives, with physical health being just one source. For others, distress may be predominately physical health related. Diverse, and sometimes multiple, losses may be experienced and these can often be associated with physical health conditions, for instance, employment loss, financial instability, changes in identity, ability and relationships. For some individuals, their physical health condition may have resulted in sudden and very rapid ('overnight') life changes. For others, their condition may have led to gradual health deterioration requiring constant adjustment. Some individuals may have hopes for improved health; some may find condition management challenging; and some may have life-limiting prognoses.

As a transdiagnostic model which explains psychological distress through understanding how we relate to ourselves and others, I will argue that CAT provides a helpful and flexible model for supporting individuals experiencing physical health difficulties. In this presentation, physical health will be considered broadly and will include conditions such as diabetes, pain conditions, medically unexplained symptoms, respiratory conditions, multiple sclerosis and cancer.

***Gaining Ground: what's new on the CAT landscape* is a day led by graduating CAT trainees, for aspiring, trainee and qualified CATs at any stage in their career, and all those wishing to support and scaffold CAT provision in the north.**

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