
UNDECLARED EDGES OF EQUALITY:

**SOCIAL CLASS IN THE COUNSELLING
RELATIONSHIP**

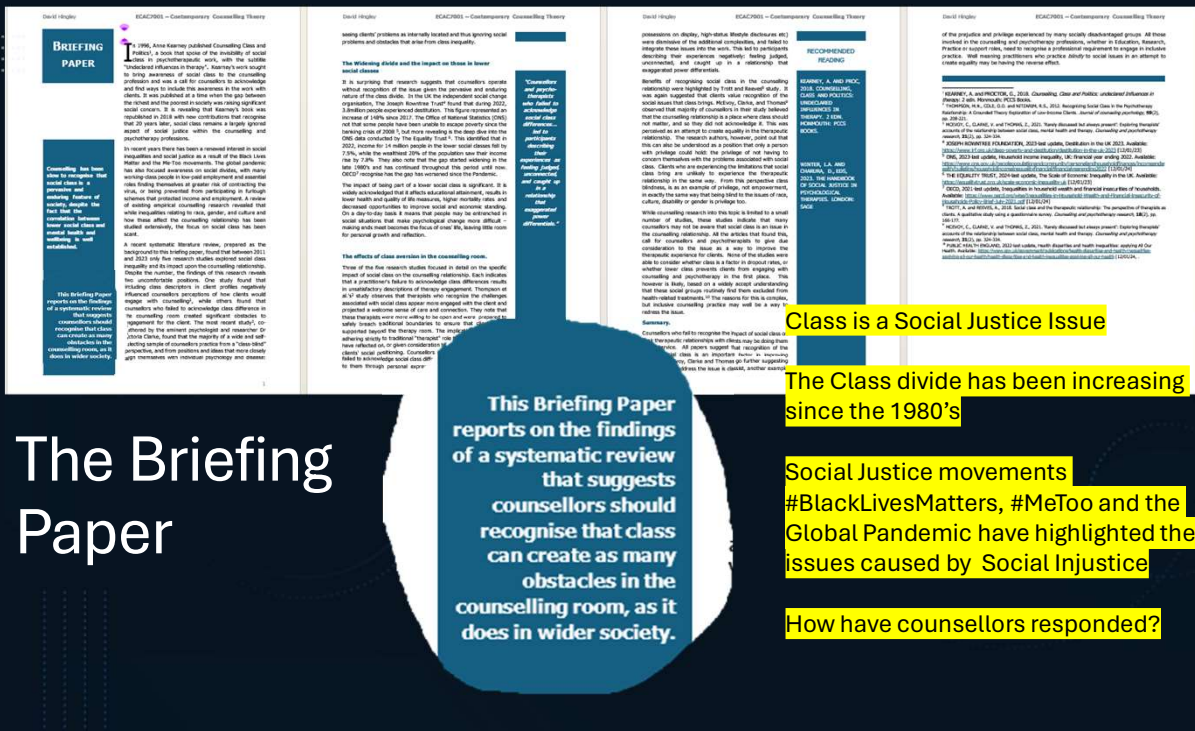


ECAC7001

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This presentation will outline the findings of a systematic review exploring Social Class and Counselling, and illustrate the points raised in a Briefing paper that came out of it.

The Briefing paper is aimed at anyone with influence in the counselling world – Educators, Supervisors, Professional Bodies, Researchers and Practitioners.



It is surprising that research suggests that counsellors operate without recognition of the issue given the pervasive and enduring nature of the class divide.

- The Joseph Rowntree Trust found that during 2022, 3.8million people experienced destitution. This figure represented an increase of 148% since 2017.
- (ONS) note that some people have been unable to escape poverty since the banking crisis of 2008 ,
- The Equality Trust (using ONS data) identified that in 2022, income for 14 million people in the lower social classes fell by 7.5%, while the wealthiest 20% of the population saw their income rise by 7.8% They also note that the gap started widening in the late 1980's and has continued throughout this period until now. OECD recognise has the gap has worsened since the Pandemic.

- The impact of being part of a lower social class is significant. Effects
 - educational attainment,
 - lower health and quality of life measures,
 - higher mortality rates
 - decreased opportunities to improve social and economic standing.
- On a day-to-day basis it means that people may be entrenched in social situations that make psychological change more difficult – making ends meet becomes the focus of ones' life, leaving little room for personal growth and reflection.

Does Class Matter in Counselling?

Michael is a 28-year-old from a low-income background. He lives in a two bedroomed terraced house in the Welsh valleys and is currently on Universal Credit and unemployed.

Introducing your client

He went to university but left after 2 years, but in the meantime had the opportunity to work as a temporary production assistant at S4C. After the job came to an end, Michael hoped to find employment in a similar capacity, but has not been successful. Michael has difficulty in sleeping and is increasingly concerned that co-workers from his old job are spreading unfavourable opinions about him within the TV industry.

Talk through exercise

Does Class Matter in Counselling?

Michael is a 28-year-old from a working-class background, he lives in two-bedroom house, and currently working as a meter-reader for a power company.

Introducing your client

He went to university but left after 2 years, but in the meantime had the opportunity to work as a temporary production assistant at S4C. After the job came to an end, Michael hoped to find employment in a similar capacity, but has not been successful. Michael has difficulty in sleeping and is increasingly concerned that co-workers from his old job are spreading unfavourable opinions about him within the TV industry.

Does Class Matter in Counselling?

Introducing your client

Michael is a 28-year-old from a middle-class background, living in new housing development, and currently working in an insurance company's HR department.

He went to university but left after 2 years, but in the meantime had the opportunity to work as a temporary production assistant at S4C. After the job came to an end, Michael hoped to find employment in a similar capacity, but has not been successful. Michael has difficulty in sleeping and is increasingly concerned that co-workers from his old job are spreading unfavourable opinions about him within the TV industry.

Does Class Matter in Counselling?

Introducing your client

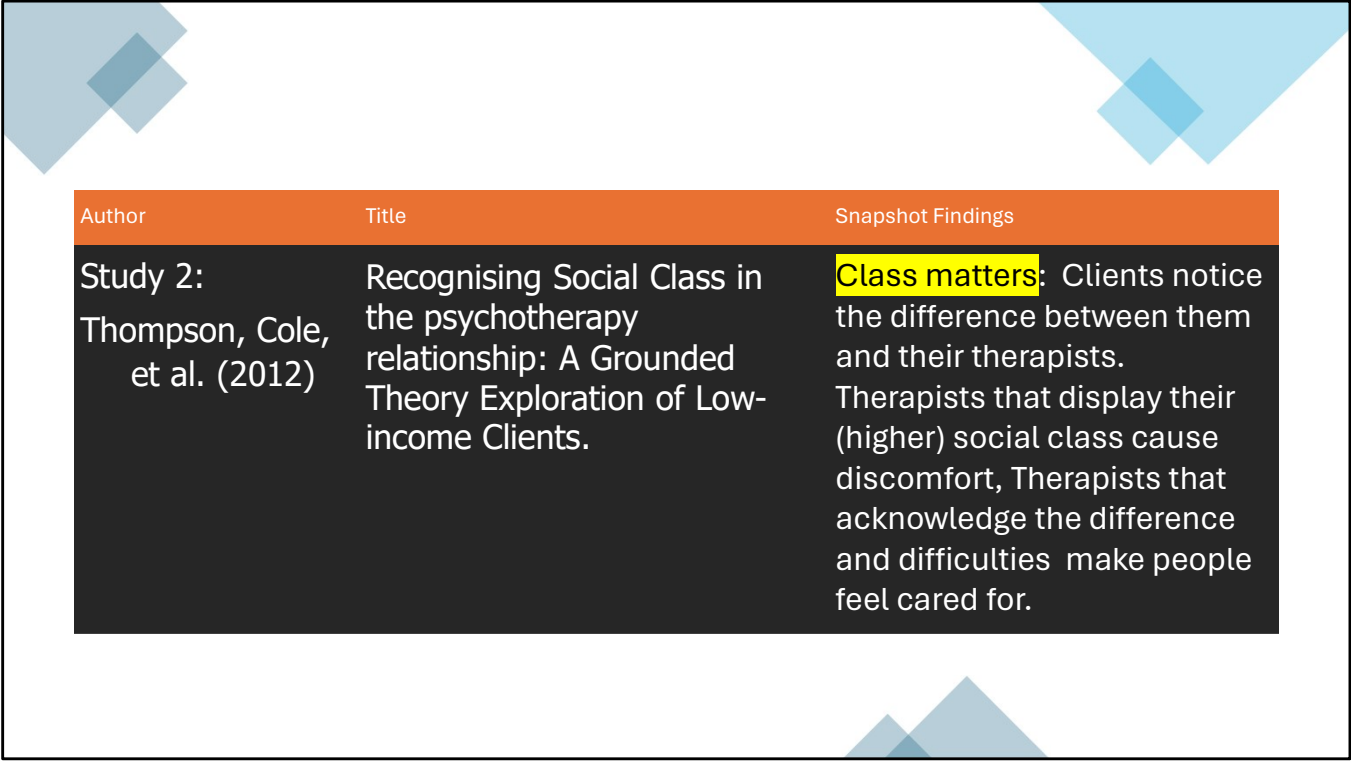
Michael is a 28-year-old from a wealthy background, currently residing in a family-owned apartment in the maritime quarter in Swansea. He has income from a Trust Fund and investments, and he currently helps to manage his family's financial and philanthropic interests.

He went to university but left after 2 years, but in the meantime had the opportunity to work as a temporary production assistant at S4C. After the job came to an end, Michael hoped to find employment in a similar capacity, but has not been successful. Michael has difficulty in sleeping and is increasingly concerned that co-workers from his old job are spreading unfavourable opinions about him within the TV industry.

Author	Title	Snapshot Findings
Study 1: Smith, Mao et al. (2011)	The relationship of clients' social class to early therapeutic impression.	Class matters: Therapists who saw the scenario which described the clients from lower social class, believed that there was less chance of a positive outcome. AND practitioners would prefer not to work with them, (especially if they believed that the world is fair - people just get what they deserve).

Discuss relationship between exercise and this study

Belief in Just World (BJW) Scale uses to measure therapist attitude.



Author	Title	Snapshot Findings
Study 2: Thompson, Cole, et al. (2012)	Recognising Social Class in the psychotherapy relationship: A Grounded Theory Exploration of Low- income Clients.	Class matters: Clients notice the difference between them and their therapists. Therapists that display their (higher) social class cause discomfort, Therapists that acknowledge the difference and difficulties make people feel cared for.



Author	Title	Snapshot Findings
Study 3: Thompson' Deistelmann et al. (2014)	Influence of Social Class Perceptions among mental health practitioners.	Class didn't matter. Similar to, but not the same as, Smith 2011. Authors worried that therapists were aware of what they were supposed to say.

Author	Title	Snapshot Findings
Study 4: Trott and Reeves. (2018)	Social Class and the therapeutic relationship: The perspective of therapists as clients. A Qualitative study using a questionnaire survey.	Class matters: Therapists who display their higher-class status (décor, lifestyle disclosures etc) are negatively perceived and damaging to the therapeutic relationship. Clients who identified positively with being working class considered themselves equal, but those who felt “shame” about their class felt caught in an unfavourable power dynamic.

Author	Title	Snapshot Findings
Study 5: McEvoy, Clarke and Thomas, 2021	"Rarely discussed but always present": Exploring therapists' accounts of the relationship between social class, mental health and therapy.	Counsellors say "Class doesn't matter - it's the relationship that counts, we are all equal in the counselling room." Authors argue that this flies in the face of social justice: failing to recognise social class and its impact on therapy is something that only those with a <i>PRIVILEGED</i> viewpoint can hold. Class Matters!



Summary

- Class matters in the counselling room.
- Showing off one's wealth alienates clients while recognising obstacles caused by class may improve alliance
- McEvoy, Clarke and Thomas (2021) go further:
 - failure to address the issue is classist, another example of the prejudice and privilege experienced by many socially disadvantaged groups
- Well-meaning practitioners who practice *blindly* to social issues in an attempt to promote equality are doing clients a mis-service.
- All those involved in the counselling and psychotherapy professions, whether in Practice, Supervision, Education, Research, or support roles, need to recognise a professional requirement to engage in inclusive practice which includes recognising class differences.

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