

The impact of oppression

From overbearing colleagues to a tyrannical partner, we can be oppressed without knowing it. Professor Sarah Niblock, CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, and therapist Eugene Ellis discuss the effects of oppression, and how to recognise it



DO WE KNOW when we are being oppressed? Recent global events have

thrown a light on oppression in society, but what about in our personal lives – what does oppression look like? It can affect how we live our lives, even when we are unaware of it. In an enlightening conversation on this month's podcast, Eugene Ellis explains the impact of oppression, and how others can cause us to be alienated from parts of ourselves.

Sarah
CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy

About the UKCP and how to find a therapist

• **The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)** is the leading research, innovation, educational and

regulatory body working to advance psychotherapy for the benefit of all. We have a register of more than 8,000 individual members, who offer a range of therapy approaches for couples, individuals, families and groups. We also have more than 70 training

and accrediting organisations for those who wish to become psychotherapists.

• **To find the right therapist for you** or learn how to become a therapist, visit psychotherapy.org.uk



UKCP psychotherapist Eugene Ellis discusses how oppression can manifest in our lives, and ways to address it

We are rarely aware of the oppression that we face. When mistreated people arrive for psychotherapy, they often feel a sense of alienation from aspects of themselves, and separate from others. Importantly, where there is a feeling of alienation, oppression is often at play.

Most people have experienced power being exerted over them during childhood, but oppression can happen at any time in our lives – an abusive partner or in a familial relationship, and even a workmate can oppress us. Oppression isn't always noticed because it is by its very nature *meant* to be unconscious,

as if it is just us feeling that way. In some cases, our brain doesn't want us to be conscious of our oppression because of the anger that it brings, and we end up compartmentalising things. That is why, in so many cases, people are oblivious, never fully realising their alienation.

To survive and feel safe, we may deny parts of ourselves, but that can become painful. Some may live with the denied aspects of themselves forever but, for others, situations arise where those denied parts want to be heard or seen.

When the scales fall...

The pandemic, Brexit and the Black Lives Matter movement have challenged people to look at the ways that they are being oppressed.

Left unaddressed, feelings of alienation can have a huge impact on all aspects of our lives, for example, negative self-talk or an inability to

regulate emotions. More subtly, it can have physical symptoms or manifest as addiction.

The most important thing to remember is that connection can be the antidote. Being with others who share our experience can be liberating, but challenging too. Often, when people become aware of their connected experience, a sense of communal anger can arise. This is where social action, psychotherapeutic support and staying connected can help us heal.



The podcast

When someone exerts power over us, we can become separated from the parts of ourselves that were challenged. We may suppress these aspects for psychological safety and be unaware of the effects. Sarah Niblock and Eugene Ellis offer insight into the causes and implications of alienation. Listen at psychologies.co.uk/oppression-and-signs-it-your-life-podcast-ukcp

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HOW I BECAME A THERAPIST



Eugene Ellis's personal insight into the power of therapy drew him to the field

IN THE MID-80S AND EARLY 90S, I worked in the music industry as a sound engineer during a period that became known as the 'British soul explosion'. It was an exciting and mesmerising time. While I was in what might have been seen as an enviable position, I was depressed without knowing why.

I found a therapist and then a therapy group, where I developed a realisation that it was possible to make contact with forgotten parts of the self and bring them to life. Over time, I turned what felt like my grey world into a world of colour. My strongest recollection of therapy was the feeling of being attended to and being seen. I began internalising this and saw the value of being validated as an essential part of attaining self-worth. I wanted to bring this experience to others and especially to those in my community. eeabe.co.uk

The psychotherapeutic process

Psychotherapy can help you understand and articulate your experiences of oppression in a space that feels safe

1 *The cornerstone of oppression is to make you feel alone in your experience and therefore question its reality. In order to address your experience, a therapist will build a relationship with you that focuses on trust and safety so, when issues relating to your oppression are revealed during sessions, it is in a space that is unoppressive.*

2 *Finding the words to communicate your oppression can be difficult because language can be limiting. The therapist might include art therapy when words are*

insufficient. Art therapy doesn't only mean painting or drawing, it could be through music, poetry or other forms of artistic expression. Your experience of alienation can sometimes only be put into the words of your oppressor, so non-verbal communication may hold more meaning for you.

3 *You will lead the therapy session, which can be empowering. This allows the exploration of your experience and facilitates your reconnection with parts of yourself that you may have masked for psychological protection.*