

1953

## **An Inability to Mourn: racism, shame and grief**

Lindsey Nicholls<sup>1</sup>, Michelle Elliot<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*University of Essex, School and Health and Social Care, Essex, UK,* <sup>2</sup>*Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, UK*

**Introduction:** In Freud's seminal paper 'mourning and melancholia' (1917) he distinguishes between those who are able to mourn (i.e. relinquish their loved object or an idealised self) and those who become melancholic (i.e. forever lamenting the lost 'object'). By considering the painful process of mourning, which may be needed to truly relinquish an ideal or object, the authors began to think through meaningful encounters within their occupational therapy research and practice.

**Method:** By drawing on their reflexive accounts from two doctoral research projects, they describe moments of shame, loss and grief in relation to encountering aspects of race and racism within their respective studies of occupational therapy. Integrating theories of intersubjectivity (Benjamin, 2004) racism, (Straker, 2004, Atkar, 2014) and clinical reasoning (Egan, 2007) within the qualitative research traditions of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002, Pillow, 2003) the authors discuss their findings.

**Practice Implications:** It is by acknowledging the loss for an 'other' (i.e. the client), for oneself (i.e. an idealised researcher-therapist) and/or the professional endeavour (OT) that can allow for authentic relationships and/or new learning to occur.

**Conclusion:** The authors suggest that within a professional rhetoric of a positive outcomes that can be achieved through empowerment and enablement, a shadow of a disavowal may be cast on complexity and complicity, which could prevent the painful and necessary process of mourning to proceed. Our experience suggests that clinical and research discussions which include stories of shame, grief and failure can assist in developing ethically reflexive practitioners who can learn from misunderstandings and their (inevitable) mistakes.