

My Psychotherapy Career: Overcoming the challenges of psychotherapy training

With UKCP psychotherapist Luq Adejumo

Jenna:

Hello and welcome to My Psychotherapy Career, a podcast where we explore the different therapeutic settings our members work in and how they came to their career. I am Jenna Rachid, the digital engagement officer at UKCP. Our host Helen Willingham is the head of content and engagement at UKCP, overseeing all our communications to members and the public, as well as our policy and research work. In this episode, Helen speaks to UKCP psychotherapists Luq Adejumo. Prior to training as a psychotherapist, Luq spent 25 years in the advertising industry. Drawn to mental health and wanting a better balance and autonomy in his work and life, Luq sought a career in psychotherapy. Now working psychotherapeutically in the School of Life and in private practice, Luq has a keen interest in issues related to anxiety, depression, family dynamics, race, gender and sexuality. In this episode, Helen speaks to Luq. She seeks to find out how he balanced full-time work and training in the pursuit of beginning his own psychotherapeutic practice.

Helen:

So, I just wanted to start by saying thank you for joining me today, Luq. It's a pleasure to speak to you. And I'm actually going to start with a really big question. Why did you become a psychotherapist?

Luq:

I was a Samaritan when I started out in advertising as a grad trainee. I did that because I wanted to give a bit back. And the experience of being a Sam was challenging, but like, incredibly rewarding from a human interaction standpoint. Sort of honing in on my listening skills to connect with someone at, I guess, in a point of acute distress. And it sparks a kernel of an interest in working one-on-one with someone in the future. So, I sort of park that thought for another seven years. And then I did an integrative course at Regents, which I found really powerful and really engaging. Again, I sort of parked that for the time being, mainly because I was aware that the time and the money commitments were considerable. So, it took another 15 years to be a senior enough level in advertising to be able to afford it and to feel that I could find a way of balancing it with a really challenging job.

Helen:

And was there a particular thing that then prompted you to begin the training after those 15 years?

Luq:

I got to the point where I felt that I was ready to do it. I started off as operations director at an agency called Saatchi. And the fact that I was quite senior in my role there would enable me to leverage and control my time a little bit more. At the time I was 44 and I wanted to do it before I was 50.

Helen:
And you did.

Luq:
And I did.

Helen:
Excellent. And what does being a UKCP member mean to you?

Luq:
I guess I'm at the beginning of my journey with UKCP as a qualified as a member, a full member, the year before last. But it's incredibly important to me that I'm accredited by UKCP as it signals a lot in the wider world, the wider therapeutic world, in terms of the academic rigour that I've gone through and the experience that I have under my belt. So, with hindsight, I think for me, it was a shame that I didn't engage more with UKCP as a student. But saying that I already had my hands for balancing my course with a full-time job. So, I'm not sure that would have been viable.

Helen:
Yeah, I can understand having a full-time job and training, that does take up a lot of your time. That doing more or getting more involved can be a big ask. And now you work in both private practice and you also work for The School of Life as well. What was it that drew you to private practice?

Luq:
After working full-time in advertising for 25 years under challenging circumstances from a stress standpoint, I was keen to do my own thing, kind of away from an organisation. So, private practice, it kind of seemed like a no brainer to me. And I kind of quickly realised that if I was going to leave advertising, I'd need a bridge between finishing and also then starting in the profession, because I wouldn't instantly have the clients to be able to build up a practice. So, I knew that I needed the help of an organisation, or at least a role, to get client referrals. And given that I'd worked in a complex, kind of, high-pressure work environment for the past two decades - well I'd worked in several - I was really circumspect about who I worked with. And The School of Life has an enviable reputation, brand around the world, sort of doing a whole host of different things. And they just seem like a perfect fit. So, it's great to strike a balance between still being part of a team but also building my own private practice and having that fluidity around my life again, you know. I hadn't had that for 25 years.

Helen:
How do you approach that? Did you kind of start off small and build up to work out what the best work-life balance was? How do you approach that, with it being so different?

Luq:
I hired a coach just when I left advertising and I worked with her for six months. It was a really helpful thing to do to make that transition.

Helen:
When you were setting up in private practice, you mentioned about not having the client straight away. How

did you look at developing your clients and getting clients?

Luq:

You know, get clients online directly through The School of Life. I'm also signed up to quite a few search engines. So, The Back in Asian Network, so BAATN, Counselling Directory, Psychology Today, Pink Therapy, I'm also on their search engine. And obviously, I'm on UKCP. Being out there, so when clients are searching is really, really important. It's really important for me in terms of building up a client base. But also, kind of one of the most crucial things, I think, for me has been trying to build a network of colleagues. A sort of a tribe, as I call it. So, you can cross refer clients onto. So, there's some sort of cross pollination, but also to be able to have a dialogue about reading material or particularly challenging cases. So, it's really helpful to expand the network, especially when I guess for me, I'm so used to working in big organisations, at least 250 people, and suddenly to be working on my own, I knew would be a challenge.

Helen:

And was that something you did through training? Or how have you developed that tribe?

Luq:

It's through lots of different avenues. From attending private practice conferences to attending CPDs, to, you know, attending various sort of committees. You know, one of the great avenues I would recommend is The Relational School. I joined them. And there's a constant dialogue there in regard to either client referrals or to content that people are sharing about, you know, events that are going on or things that they found useful that they want to share with colleagues. So yeah, lots of different avenues. I don't think there's one way to do it, you know, because it takes time to build lots of different relationships and also to chance on the right people. So, it's a work in progress, really.

Helen:

Just thinking about people who might be trying to start their own private practice, do you have any advice you would give to psychotherapists or psychotherapeutic counsellors?

Luq:

Try and be clear about what you want to say about your practice and the audiences you want to approach, that's kind of key. To be on the search engines, they will require content that clients are going to be seeing about you. And so, showing that that content is clear and consistent is really important. Because that's kind of why clients will be engaging with you. And also, you're going to be asked about that when clients are in front of you, you know, assessment or consultation. So, being really clear about what you want to say out there. Finding avenues to meet other psychotherapists is kind of crucial. I think working out what you're going to charge. I mean, obviously, a lot of psychotherapists have sliding scales. And be able to justify it as well, because clients will ask. As a profession, we're not great about talking about money. So, I think that's important to focus on. And working out how many clients you want and you need. Working out what your boundaries are, for me, was really important. So, after having worked in a profession where, you know - I worked lots of weekends, I would work late into the evening - I really wanted to boundary how long I worked. A really big one is getting your head around monies. And I think that's one of the things that institutes and the educational institutions aren't great at. If you're in private practice, you're running your own mini-business, and that's one thing I had to get my head around quite quickly, even though I had been an operations director in a large business. Working out a whole myriad of different things for myself

financially was really important. So, things like tax, you know, are you going to be a sole trader, are you going to be a limited company, accounting? All of those things, I think are really crucial in terms of getting your head around. Making sure you've got a really good website and being really clear about how you want to approach social media. Don't be afraid to test things. And don't be disheartened if they don't land. So yeah, they would be the key points of advice that I would give someone that was thinking about private practice.

Helen:

Thanks, Luq. I think there's loads to go on there. But I just want to pick up on one point. You said about being clear about audiences you want to approach. How did you go about deciding, sort of, what client groups or audience you would want to approach?

Luq:

Well, for me, it was kind of, I guess, really important to look at clients and issues that related to how I experienced the world. So, client groups that I already had a shorthand to their frame of reference, in a way. I kind of chose three groups. So, I'd worked with LGBTQIA+ clients for three years when I was training. And it's a really important client group for me, given that I'm gay, so that was kind of key. But then, working with people who have a varied kind of racial background - and experienced racism, given my experience as a black man - that was another key audience. And the third one is those that were struggling with their kind of work-life balance. Given the sort of 25-year experience that I've had from a corporate background and the experiences that I encountered there, I can really tap into their frame of reference. So, they're the kind of three audiences that I looked at, mainly because I guess I had context. But I've spoken to quite a few psychotherapists who say that in time what happens is the clients find you. And I don't think I'm quite there yet in my career where that's happening. So, I know that I've got to put quite a bit of energy into being out there so the clients can get to me.

Helen:

And you mentioned that you qualified the year before last, which was 2021. So, we were still in one of the COVID times if you'd like. Do you think that led to you having more of an online presence than you might have done otherwise?

Luq:

Most definitely. There's no way I would have envisaged that the lion's share of my practice would be online, because all of my training was, you know, in-person, prior to COVID. It's really surprised me in more ways than one about the quality of practice that can happen online and the depth that can be garnered. Just thinking a bit more outside of the box in regard to what can work with your client.

Helen:

Looking back now, is there anything you wish you knew before you started training?

Luq:

When I thought about doing training, it was more about well, how can I help others? And how can I work with others? You know, something about being in relation with others. But actually, the focus on the relationship with myself was key to my progression in my training and to being a good psychotherapist. So, that's one thing I didn't know. I think knowing how much of a time commitment it is, I had to make a choice on who and what I spent my time on. So, I saw less people. I didn't watch TV for six years, you know, really. I

had to be really acute about how I spent my time, because there was so much to do. I wish I knew that placements aren't easy to secure, you know. Trying to get a placement can be tantamount to trying to get a full-time job, you know. And it's really hard to start off with because, for UKCP you had to get 450 client-hours. And it's like starting your first job in a way because you put your CV in and the employers like 'well you haven't got an experience so we're not going to take you on.' Similarly, when you're at you know, almost zero hours or you're at 50 hours, a lot of charities are reticent about working with their clients mainly because of experience on the belt. So that's challenging, but it's something you do get over. So, I think getting on the case with that early doors is really important. So, if you're in your first year, it's really important that you don't wait till the end of your first year to be looking for your main placements. And the last thing I'd say is I wish I knew that there was a structure to writing academic essays, and that I'd be okay. Uni was 20, like 25 years prior [when] I did my BA. So, getting back into academia, and then pushing up to master's level was a real challenge. But knowing that there's a way to do it would have made it easier for me.

Helen:

Thanks, Luq. And we've talked a little bit about this, but how did you manage the logistics of training? And we've talked about the time commitment and thinking about who and what you spend time on. But obviously, there's the cost, the time, you did it whilst you're working as well.

Luq:

You know, I won't lie, it was incredibly difficult at times. I realised that I had to be incredibly organised with carving out the time in my diary. It was just acute in terms of my training because that was crucial in terms of both getting my hours and also just ticking all the boxes in terms of my supervision hours, my therapy hours, and my, you know, my client hours. So, I had to boundary that from then my full-time job. And it was also key to ensure that I was delivering my full-time job because my employer for the first three years didn't even know I was doing a therapy course. So, I think trying to boundary and you know, occasionally what I'd have to do is I'd see clients in the evening. But I knew that it was a six-year time period that I'd have to do it for, I knew it wasn't going to be forever, and that I was working towards something. And that made it more viable in terms of knowing that there was a time period on it. I knew I couldn't drop any balls because one was funding the other. So yeah, it was just organisation that kind of got me through it really in terms of logistics.

Helen:

And what advice would you give to someone who's considering training as a psychotherapist or a psychotherapeutic counsellor?

Luq:

That's a really good question. I would say, for me, take it in bite sized chunks. I mean, I just focused on getting through year by year. So, I didn't look at the long-term goal of being a psychotherapist, I looked at it as an experience. And for me, that was really helpful because it kept me in the moment rather than worrying about getting to the end. I'd say do an intro course. If you're thinking about it, and you're not sure if you'd be the right kind of person or you're not sure about the commitment, you know, lots of institutions, Metanoia included, will do an intro weekend, you know, where you come along, you'll meet the head of a course probably or a course tutor and they'll just talk you through what it will involve. And yeah, just want to reiterate to anyone thinking about it, there are courses out there that you can balance it around, both part-time work and full-time work.

Helen:

Thanks, Luq. And my final question. How has psychotherapeutic training changed you?

Luq:

I mean, I have a role that I find really fulfilling. I've got a better relationship with myself and those around me, there's no question about that. You know, it was a considerable investment during the course. And even if I hadn't decided to become a full-time psychotherapist, it would still be worth the investment. I'm able to work through my own stuff in real time and realise what isn't mine. And I much better boundary-ing. You know, I had to make the journey myself as well. And I think that for me was one of the most rewarding things: to have got to a different place in terms of how I relate to the world.

Helen:

Thank you so much for joining me today, Luq, and for walking through your career and your training. So much valuable advice there as well. So thank you.

Luq:

Well, thank you very much for having me, Helen.

Helen:

You're very welcome.

Jenna:

That was UKCP psychotherapist Luq Adejumo speaking to Helen Willingham, our head of content and engagement. If you're interested in exploring training, then you can visit our psychotherapy training page, where you can find information on psychotherapy as a career, as well as the different training pathways available to you. Just go to www.psychotherapy.org.uk/psychotherapy-training. All episodes of My Psychotherapy Career are available on our website, psychotherapy.org.uk. You can also subscribe to our channel, UKCP, on your favourite streaming platform. Do you have feedback you'd like to share with us on this episode or any from our series? Get in touch with us at communications@ukcp.org.uk. Join us again next month. Till then, thank you for listening and take good care of yourselves.