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Critically discuss the impact of microaggressions
within the therapeutic relationship.

This essay will be focusing on how the therapeutic relationship is affected by acts of micro-aggression; as well as the various parameters, the consequences of those acts on the individual (with emphasis on racial micro-aggression), the consequences of such behaviour upon a person, how the counsellor is responsible, the professionalism displayed in those occurrences and the repercussions the participants (client and counsellor) can face by being the recipients of those acts. In today's world, a considerable number of people have access to an infinite amount of information, which can be used to self-educate oneself in order to help in lessening stereotypes that are used to offend groups and individuals through biased means, whereas of using that information to enlighten themselves and teach others how false, oppressive and offensive those impressions are to people have been victims of micro-aggression. The definition of micro-aggression is stated as follows: "A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group such as a racial or ethnic minority" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, und).

To begin with, acts of micro-aggression can be categorised in many types, such as racial, gender, sexual, mental etc, and they all result in causing mental strain for those on the

receiving end; acts of micro-aggression are often done unbeknownst to the individual and it is not unlikely to happen within the counselling sphere; it has been reported that the first appearance of the use of the word micro-aggression was in a 1970s research by psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce research, then Derald Wing Sue shaped the term to its current definition (Wilson, 2016). Further, micro-aggression is an issue that not many people and psychotherapists are informed resulting in daily acts containing micro-aggressive themes which people are either not conscious of or are intentionally attempting to harm individuals. In addition, micro-aggression is made of three types and those are: micro-invalidations, expressions that cause an individual to experience various forms of doubt; micro-assaults, are described as conscious attacks of discrimination, and micro-insults are means of undervaluing a person's race, gender etc.

Eventually, acts of micro-aggression are caused due to the unawareness of diversity between cultures and prejudicial opinions between the participants — client and counsellor — in therapeutic relationships, the lack of awareness about the client's cultural identity, everything that is consisted of and the presumptuous societal ties that have been rooted into the subconscious; if the counsellor communicates through emphasising or pointing out information that goes against the client's cultural background it is detected as a sign of micro-aggression by them as it can be considered offensive and a nullification. (Tao et al. 2014) For instance, it cannot be denied that people are being discriminated based on the colour of their skin and because of the stereotypes associated with that they do not get promoted, the amount of hard work and long hours means nothing against prejudice. In addition, the most seen form of micro-aggression in this day is racial micro-aggression; in an article define racial micro-aggression as follows. (Tran et al. 2015)

Racial microaggressions are everyday indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights to the target, but often are communicated unconsciously and can be rationalized by the communicator as having a different meaning or intention than the one perceived by the target (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

To demonstrate; as society, people make assumptions, judgements based on what they see on a superficial level and according to fabricated facts that have resulted in the creation of what is called stereotypes; as a result, even counsellors have been influenced from the biases in a subconscious and unconscious level. More, even the nature of a simple question like asking a person's birthplace can be considered micro-aggressive, depending on the client's racial background and ethnicity — among other factors — and where the individuals are located. For example; the following expression might not appear to be problematic, yet there are some underlying issues that have been obscured because of its simplicity and apparent innocence: "You are so articulate." Even though the counsellor — who has used the aforementioned phrase — may not have consciously intended to provoke the recipient, since they might have thought it would be perceived as a compliment in the case of the client having recently moved in the country from abroad. However, the counsellor in that case did not take into consideration the masked incursion the expression could bear; the recipient would have thought that their race ethnicity is being discriminated to the counsellor's which will put a strain on the therapeutic relationship (Sph.umn.edu, 2019).

Furthermore, one of the definitive points of micro-aggression is the possibility that it can be expressed without the intention of harming the person the individual is engaging with

in a dialogue. In detail; Derald Wing Sue, a professor of counselling psychology expressed the following in a talk: “ I believe that all of us are good, moral, decent individuals. But we have been conditioned and inherit biases that hurt others” (Implicit Bias and Microaggressions: the Macro Impact of Small Acts, 2015). Sue’s words voice an undeniably fact, people are not rude and insensitive by nature but are groomed to be so or acquire certain attributes and notions through education and society, impressions that have — and continue to — turned into stigmas for minority groups which lead to mental, emotional and physical trauma(s). In addition; there are instances where a person has conveyed micro-aggressive comment(s) without genuinely realising it; for these instances, it would be beneficial — for both sides of the episode — if those on the receiving end attempt to inform the doer if they are able to, as this will create an opportunity for dialogue in a civilised manner which will result in the doer spreading the word and recognising their own mishap and the doer be compassionate, patient, open-minded and curious in order to acknowledge where the problem’s origins is and educate themselves.

Moreover; in a counselling session the relationship between client and counsellor is vitally important, there is a bond of trust that has — and carries on — been build over time, a connection that on the condition it gets broken the likelihood of successfully amending the bond will not be easily accomplished or might not be effective for the client; an adversity that can have a heavier impact on people battling with mental illness; as people with mental illness cope with life in a set amount of challenges on a day-to-day basis and their mental health as well as other aspects of their health has been compromised, they have sought help in order to heal those issues in the space provided in counselling which the counsellor — based on the client’s need — I has helped to establish. Although, if that trust was to be weakened by signs or even acts of micro-aggression e.g racial, the patient’s connection with the counsellor

would be induced with substantial distress. On the whole, there is a plethora of emotional and psychological ramifications of the loss of trust for the patient in a therapeutic relationship, like heightened anxiety, depression, self-esteem , etc (Peters et al. 2017).

On one side; there is the client whose feelings are of great significance in the therapeutic relationship and on the other side there is the counsellor, whose professionalism within the counselling session can be questioned if they display forms of micro-aggression onto the client; it will not be just the reliance between the two that will be damaged, but the counsellor's credibility. More, in the event of that happening the counsellor should aim to communicate his lack of knowledge to the client and understand the biases hidden within their words to avoid future misconduct and harm upon the client (Services, 2014). The counsellor has the responsibility of exploring and researching with the purpose of understanding and dissolving the personal biases they have; the client is more unlikely to express their disdain and avoid challenging the issue that has arise which is an obstacle in the process to mend their relationship, continue to help the client and the opportunity for improvement on false societal expectations and ideas. To conclude, it is essential for the therapist(s) to keep themselves informed on the different forms of aggression and micro-aggression with the hopes of avoiding misunderstandings and deteriorating the relationship they have with the client.

On the other side; the emotions and mental state of the patient is critical and can be fragile within an environment that provides acceptance and freedom to be vulnerable. The client is going through a turmoil of feelings and anticipates the counselling to release their inner thoughts, worries and doubts with the intention to heal, communicate and decipher their anxieties to the person they have entrusted the most vulnerable aspect of their life and personality. Therefore, the counsellor is a figure of trust, who to some extent could be

considered a person of power within the therapeutic session; the difference in control over the healing appointment can create feelings of inequality and inferiority in the episode of micro-aggression, since the sufferer will not believe they are able to voice their opinion and contempt.

“It is not reasonable to assume that the client is responsible for policing the perpetration of microaggressions committed by the psychotherapist in psychotherapy. Given that the psychotherapist is in an elevated power role, the client may not feel comfortable addressing the situation. Aside from the power differential, hostility is the typical reaction clients receive when they identify microaggressions in the psychotherapy (Sue et al., 2007)” (Williams et al., 2017)

Furthermore; there is one more scenario on the issue of micro-aggression within the therapeutic relationship, psychotherapists who belong in minority groups are prone to have those encounters and are placed in a problematic position. More, the counsellor is equipped with three characteristics in order to be able to establish a helping relationship with the patient: congruence, unconditional positivity and empathy; those conditions are meant to be enhance the counsellor's skill of compassion, understanding and empathy not only towards the patient, but for themselves when the need arises.

However, for a counsellor whose origin is of a minority group those conditions might result in difficulty; the psychotherapist does their best within the capabilities they possess to support the client with the issues at hand; when the client is the one who has expressed micro-aggression with their words in the sessions, the counsellors is put in the position of either ignoring the event for the purpose of continuing to help the client in spite of the distress that they are undergoing or end the relationship. Further, there is an essential

difference between the client and therapist experiencing micro-aggression; the counsellor due to their training have had more contacts with people from diverse racial/cultural backgrounds which has enabled them to see and learn beyond the stereotypes associated with an individual's culture, but the client is not aware of what and how the consequences of their actions can affect the victim (Williams et al., 2017) . In addition, a way to resolve that issue would be to provide patients with informations and lessons to encourage them to recognise the significance of their words.

In conclusion, micro-aggression is an issue which needs to promoted more by the media and education sectors as it will serve as a tool for eliminating stereotypes, biases step-by-step and confront inaccurate perceptions towards marginalised groups. The outcomes victims of micro-aggression come to face affect their psychological wellbeing to a degree where daily tasks and interactions are becoming hard to handle; when a situation like that takes place within the counselling territory, both therapist and patient are in danger of experiencing undesirable effects for their mental health. Minority groups are one of the most susceptible to racial micro-aggressive offences because of the lack of education provided by schools and society, the subconscious and unconscious prejudices that have been passed down from generation to generation will not cease to exist if the media, education, family and society does not raise awareness and pursue to eradicate the misconception surrounding minority crowds. In addition, the population is need of challenging episodes of micro-aggression when they witness such acts, protect those who are not able to defend themselves and make efforts to inform the perpetrators as some of them can be unperceptive to the fact they have conduct such actions.

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