

Reflective Activity

Where do I fit in **'the system'**?

The importance of anti-
oppressive practice in
psychotherapy

What is Anti-Oppressive Practice?

A framework recognising the systems of oppression that exists in our society (and their interconnected nature) and aims to mitigate their effects and equalise the power imbalances that exist between people.

(Aquil et al., 2021).

'The Systems'

White Supremacy (racial hierarchy)

Capitalism (economic hierarchy)

Patriarchy (gender hierarchy)

→ colonialism, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, hetero- and neuronormativity

Therapy does not exist in a vacuum

Historically used as a tool of oppression: to **pathologise**, **criminalise** and **control**

Inclusion

Improving access, belonging; "everyone is welcome"; often working within existing systems

vs.

Anti-oppression

Actively challenging & attempting to change power structures that contribute to inequalities

Why is AOP Important?

“There is no such thing as neutral education. Education either functions as an instrument to bring about conformity or freedom”

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

If personal well being and liberation is tied to collective liberation, then therapy (and the training) cannot be neutral.

We have to understand the systems we are part of, and how they shape our training and ultimately the choices we make in the therapy room.

Without confronting power, privilege, identity, whiteness, and systemic inequality, therapy risks reenacting the very oppression that creates client distress.

Exercise: Three Levels of Reflection



The Institution

Where does my organisation currently sit on the inclusion → anti-oppression spectrum?

e.g. policies and practices of the university or ethical bodies like BACP

The Training Program

Where is curriculum still euro-centric or detached from real-world structural harm?

e.g. What key theories have been studied? Where do they originate from? Whose voices are included and whose aren't?

The Individual

What have I internalised from white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy, and how might this be affecting my practice?

e.g. failing to acknowledge microaggressions, or minimising or glossing over the impact of these experiences due to inadequate understanding or experience

Some Suggestions

The Institution

Strengthen accountability and CPD requirements for tutors

Advocate for diverse faculty

Ask institutions about bursaries, representation, accessibility

Support structural changes rather than tokenistic fixes

The Training Program

Diversifying theory beyond eurocentric traditions

Ask for material written by racialised scholars

Advocate for multiple worldviews and cultural healing practices

Reflect on marking criteria and assessment structures

Support psychological “brave” space, not naïve “safe” space

The Therapist

Reflect on your own identity: Continuously consider your own values, biases, and lived experience.

a) Develop awareness of privilege, power, and positionality

Be open to learning: Stay curious and be willing to learn about different worldviews, especially those of marginalized clients.

a) Apply humility, empathy, and curiosity when engaging with culture and identity

b) Reflect on collectivist vs individualist worldview

Collaborate with clients: Work with clients to help understand how systemic issues may be contributing to their difficulties.

a) Challenge microaggressions and microinvalidations rather than bypassing them or engaging in 'colour blindness'

b) Asking; 'what do you need in this space to feel safe?'

Be accountable: Be ready to apologize and fix things if you make a mistake that is harmful to a client.

Move beyond individual issues: Support the development of interventions that address social inequalities and lead to broader social change.

a) making space for culturally rooted healing practices

b) collective rather than individual change

Reflective Prompts For Researchers

- **Research Area:** How do whiteness and Eurocentrism show up in your own research field?
- **Reflective Practice:** How do you currently reflect on your own positionality as a researcher? What is made visible or invisible through this reflection?
- **Literature Reviews:** Who is consistently cited in your field? Who is missing, marginalised, or tokenised? What does that reveal about the politics of knowledge?
- **Authorship & Voice:** Who produces knowledge in your field, and whose perspectives are sidelined?
- **Institutional Barriers:** How do the norms of your discipline (journals, methodologies, grant priorities) reinforce whiteness, and where are the cracks that allow disruption?

Training Information

Training

BACP Anti-oppressive practice training: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/bacp-events/on-demand-services-group/anti-oppressive-and-inclusive-practice-in-counselling-and-psychotherapy-training/>

Counselling Tutor Podcast Episode with Mamood Ahmad : <https://counsellingtutor.com/anti-oppressive-practice-in-counselling/>

The Anti-discrimination Focus (#TADF) Training: <https://www.tadf.uk/courses/aop>

Podcasts

BACP Racism, Racial Trauma & Anti-Racism Podcast: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-us/edi/racism-podcasts/>

References & Readings

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