

Responding to Racism: Practical Suggestions for Professional Counselors

2022 GHW Counseling Workshop

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Agenda

- Explore considerations regarding racism and the profession of counseling
- Provide examples of microaggressions
- Describe ways to promote change by implementing inclusive strategies in session

Counseling

“Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.”

(Kaplan et al., 2013, p. 366)

Professional Counseling

- Celebrate Diversity
- Promote Multicultural Competence
 - Practitioners
 - Supervisors
 - Counselor Educators (Stargell et al., 2016)

Professional Counseling in the US

- People of Color will be the majority by 2025 in the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014)
- The majority of mental health professionals are white (American Psychological Association, 2011)
- “The Black Lives Matter movement can inspire us to take a step back and revisit the attention that counselors must give to the effects of racism and other types of prejudice on mental health.” (Stargell et al., 2016, p. 16)

Racism in the US

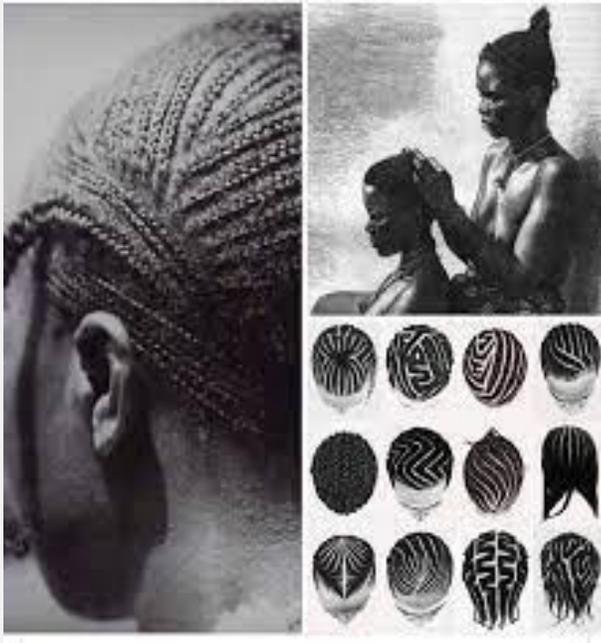
- Racism a worldwide issue
- People of Color experience instances of racism and colorism daily
- Important to address the compounded mental health issues that result from hidden racism in addition to addressing instances of overt racism, such as hate crimes or being the target of racial slurs.

Hate Crime

- Criminal offense motivated by disdain for the victim's race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or sexual identity.
- In 2014, there were 3,227 racially-motivated hate crimes, and 62.7% were anti-African American bias (U.S. Department of Justice, 2015)

Microaggressions

- Micro-aggressions promote racist messages in subtle ways (Sue & Sue, 2013)
(e.g., "Your hair looks so nice when it is straightened.")



Important Considerations

- Dunn et al. (2019) found African American women face unique challenges when it comes to body image. The authors found gendered racial microaggressions negatively impacted body appreciation and self-worth issues for African American women. **The intersectionality theory** posits racism, sexism, legal system discrimination, oppression, reproductive health disparities, and sexual objectification are factors which contributed to psychological distress.
 - Highlights the multiple identities of African American women
 - The oversexualized (Jezebel) stereotype
 - Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is prevalent but underutilized diagnosis for African American.
- There is current no specialized approaches or curriculums for African American women who struggle with body image issues.

MEN

MEET THE BLACK LAWYER WHO REFUSED TO CUT HIS LOCKS TO MAKE HIS COLLEAGUES FEEL BETTER

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- He “did not fit the look.”
- A judge even mistook him as a client instead of a law student.
- Disregarded for promotion

Invisibility Syndrome

Invisibility Syndrome is the result of persistent marginalization, stereotyping, and discrimination. The recipient of these racial slights start to believe that their true personality and the things that make them unique are invisible to the world. Invisibility Syndrome increases behaviors, feelings, and thoughts, that reduce your ability to accomplish goals, form positive relationships with important people in your life, to be happy, and to fulfill dreams (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000).

- Frustration
- Increased awareness of perceived slights
- Chronic indignation
- Pervasive discontent and disgruntlement
- Anger
- Immobilization/Increased inability to get things done
- Questioning one's worthiness
- Disillusionment and confusion
- Feeling trapped
- Conflicted racial identity
- Internalized rage
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Loss of hope

Systemic Concerns

It is systemic

Racial discrimination, profiling, and stereotyping are a part of the Black experience within America and are most powerful tools used to marginalize Black males (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000).

Racism is a chronic stressor that permeates institutions that POC are tasked with navigating.

- Government
- Healthcare
- Education
- Criminal Justice

Criminal Justice System

- Although trauma experienced at the hands of law enforcement impacts all POC, Black men have experienced this trauma and its deleterious effects disproportionately.
- One in three Black men continue to have a lifetime likelihood of imprisonment (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003).
- Although the imprisonment rate of the Black community has gradually decreased since 2008, Black men continue to have an imprisonment rate 5.8 times that of their white male counterparts in the United States (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020).
- This disproportionate representation is further highlighted by the fact that black men make up 6.4% of the U.S. population but represent nearly 34% of the prison population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020).
- At all levels of force, Blacks are more likely to have force utilized against them when encountering the police (Goff et al., 2016).

Conceptualization

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- It is difficult to process that all the unique and positive qualities possessed, do not transcend the negative perceptions and associations of their skin and cultural features
- Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, (2000) believe that African American men will use defiance and sanity checks as ways to cope with the racial slights that ultimately lead to perceived invisibility.
- Defiance: Refusal to cut his hair
- Sanity Checks: Checking in with other individuals who have been in these positions and refused to compromise

Mental Health Effects of Racism

- Typical trauma response (i.e., flashbacks, loss of pleasure, hypervigilance).
- Depression,
- Suspicion of others and the local community,
- lack of confidence,
- feelings of shame, embarrassment, isolation, and vulnerability

(Williams & Tregidga, 2014)

White Fragility

- Individualism & Objectivity
- Social Constructivism / Self in Comparison to Others
- We all have Bias
- Racializing White People
- “How did X shape me as a result of also being white?” (p.13)

(Diangelo, 2018)

Responding to Racism

- Maintain a process of lifelong learning to increase competence and maintain current standards of multicultural counseling.
 - Professional trainings
 - Work shops
 - Leadership and Advocacy
 - Staying up-to-date with history and current events
- Counselors can address issues of race by showing a genuine interest in each client
- Embrace all different racial identities and the subjective experiences of every unique individual

Responding to Racism

- Avoid a colorblind approach in which you do not see or acknowledge race
- A colorblind perspective is invalidating
- Identify and actively account for biases
- Remain aware of stereotypes and counteract unhelpful thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- If you see something, say something

Responding to Racism

- Be mindful of client language and nonverbal cues in session.
- Maintain open posture and eliminate physical barriers
- Lean forward,
- Use a soft and slow tone,
- Match and mismatch eye contact intentionally.
- Provide a safe space for clients to explore and gain insight.

Counseling Clients of Color

- Avoid attributing clients' presenting problems to race when that is potentially irrelevant
- However, be acutely aware of experiences of racism that permeate the cultural heritage and daily lives of Black Clients and other Clients of Color
- All counseling relationships include multicultural elements
- Support diverse clients, students, and colleagues

Counseling Clients of Color

- Address standard trauma responses as well as the cognitions and feelings that come as the direct result of racism.
- Validate that racism is real, and broach the subject with clients when it seems appropriate (Sue & Sue, 2013)
- Gain knowledge by asking clients about their experiences of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Working with Clients

Acknowledge difficulty and frustration in gathering the mental effort and energy to act in defiance

Being on the receiving end of acts motivated by racial contention can challenge an individual's psychological defense system made up of self-esteem, cultural worldview, and purpose.

Counselors can work with clients to restore and maintain this defense system

Counselors can provide space to explore and reflect on the effects the event had on their beliefs about self esteem, safety, trust, power, and control

Supervision and Consultation

- Supervision is a vital resource for clinicians to address personal and professional conflicts in various counseling relationships.
- Consultation is a vital resource for clinicians, supervisors and counselor educators to identify and address biases in various counseling relationships.

Conclusion

- Our clients, colleagues, students, and supervisees face many obstacles
- Effectively responding to racism involves lifelong learning and self-reflection.
- Professional counselors should intentionally identify and address covert and overt racism to support diverse individuals toward achievement of their goals.

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