



Mitigating Implicit Bias in the Form of Microaggressions in Mental Health

Thursday, June 8, 2023
12pm - 1pm ET

Live Zoom Webinar

Featuring:
Drs. Char Newton and Janeé Steele

Char Newton, PhD

Licensed Psychologist

Dr. Char Newton is a fully licensed psychologist and in practice at Legacy Mental Health Services, PLLC. Dr. Newton also has over 10 years of experience in clinical, academic, and community settings, including teaching experience at both undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education and is a member of the Michigan Board of Psychology, appointed by Governor Gretchen Whitmer. She was recently awarded the 2022 Distinguished Psychologist Award from the Michigan Psychological Association.



Janeé Steele, PhD

Licensed Professional Counselor

Dr. Janeé Steele is a licensed professional counselor, counselor educator, and diplomate of the Academy of Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies. Dr. Steele is also the owner and clinical director of Kalamazoo Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy, PLLC, where she provides therapy, supervision, and training in CBT. In addition to her clinical work, Dr. Steele is an Associate Editor of the Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development.



Learning Objectives



As a result of this webinar, you will be able to: +

- Define microaggressions and describe the impact of microaggressions on the therapeutic process
- Describe strategies to reduce and repair ruptures to the therapeutic alliance due to implicit bias and microaggressions
- Engage in reflective practices and group discussions designed to increase personal awareness of assumptions that may lead to microaggressions.
- Describe strategies to navigate microaggressions against the clinician in the therapeutic relationship

Something to Think About



If you are a target of oppression

- Be aware of anything that might be overwhelming
- Use mindfulness and breathing skills when you need to
- Take a break if necessary



If you are an ally or a learner

- Work toward maintaining a non-judgmental stance
- Recognize defensiveness
- Seek to understand

What Do You Bring Into the Room?

- Place your name in the center circle to the right. Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the attached circles. These should be identifiers or descriptors you believe are important in defining you. They can include anything, for example, Asian American, Christian, female, mother, athlete, educator, or any descriptor with which you identify.



Things I Bring Into the Room



- I am Black
- I am a woman
- I am from the metro-Detroit area
- My parents and grandparents were from the deep south of Baton Rouge, Louisiana
- I am a member of Generation X and the Millennial generation
- I am heterosexual
- I am Christian
- I am the middle child
- I am a first-generation college student and the first Ph.D. in my family

Microaggressions

Microaggressions have a significant impact on the therapeutic process

- **Microaggression:** A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority (Sue et al., 2007)
- Types of Microaggressions:
 - Microinsults
 - Microinvalidations
 - Microassaults
 - Environmental microaggressions

Microinsults

- **Microinsults:** Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's heritage or identity (Sue et al., 2007, 2019)
- **Ascription of intelligence:** A career counselor asking a Black or Latino student, “Do you think you are ready for college?”
 - **Message:** It is unusual for people of color to succeed
- **Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles:** A client of Asian or Native American descent has trouble maintaining eye contact with his therapist. The therapist diagnoses him with a social anxiety disorder.
 - **Message:** Assimilate to dominant culture

Microinsults

- **Assumption of abnormality:** Saying to a LGBT+ person, “You don’t look/sound gay”
 - **Message:** People who are gay are weird and different
- **Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles:** Asking a gay person, “Which one of you is the guy?”
 - **Message:** Assimilate to dominant culture

Microinvalidations

- **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a marginalized person (Sue et al., 2007, 2019)
- **Color blindness:** A client of color expresses concern in discussing racial issues with her therapist. Her therapist replies with, “When I see you, I don’t see color.”
 - **Message:** Your racial experiences are not valid
- **Myth of meritocracy:** A school counselor tells a Black student that “If you work hard, you can succeed like everyone else.”
 - **Message:** People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and you need to work harder. If you don’t succeed, you only have yourself to blame (blaming the victim)

Microinvalidations

- **Denial of heterosexism/transphobia:** Saying, “I’m not homophobic, but...”
 - **Message:** I am incapable of heterosexism/transphobia
- **Assumption that LGBT people are sick/sinful:** A counselor who assumes that an adolescent in early stages of gay identity development is “confused” or “going through a stage.”
 - **Message:** People with LGBT identities are psychologically unhealthy

Microassaults

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as:
 - Using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a White person before a person of color in a restaurant
 - Hate speech-like using insensitive offense words to describe someone or not respecting someone's pronouns (Sue et al., 2007, 2019)

Environmental Microaggressions

- **Environmental microaggressions:** Aspects of the environment that send a messages of invalidation to a marginalized group (Sue et al., 2007, 2019)
 - A waiting room office only has pictures of American presidents/website features pictures of heterosexual couples only
 - **Message:** You don't belong/only certain people succeed
 - Every counselor at a mental health clinic is White or straight
 - **Message:** You are an outsider/you don't exist

Navigating Cultural Ruptures

Cultural ruptures may occur

- Cultural ruptures can occur as a result of verbal and nonverbal communications
- They consist of intentional and unintentional statements that portray insensitivity, disrespect, and/or negligent attention to some salient aspect of the client's cultural heritage (Pierce et al., 1978; Sue et al., 2007)
- The impact of cultural ruptures include:
 - Limitations to client disclosure level
 - Early termination of therapy session
 - Increased self-doubt, decreased self-esteem, and feelings of embarrassment, worthlessness, shame, and anger in the client
 - Reinforcement of the client's presenting problem(s) (Miles et al., 2021)

Reducing Microaggressions and Other Ruptures to the Therapeutic Relationship

When ruptures occur, you can repair them

- Pay careful attention to the appearance of your office space
- Pay careful attention to your front desk staff in that they are well trained to treat all clients with respect
- Validate your client's pain and frustration when microaggressions are pointed out by the client
- Acknowledge your bias and assumptions...don't take the defensive stance
- Invest in learning through professional development opportunities (e.g., webinars/conferences)... you must be a lifelong learner (Williams, 2020)

Reducing Microaggressions and Other Ruptures to the Therapeutic Relationship

- Conduct a cultural interview. You can use APA's Cultural Formulation Interview to help the client tell their narrative and cultural perception of the difficulties that may bring them into counselor
- Use good test/assessment measurements that allow you to understand the client better as it relates to race-based or other cultural issues (e.g., Trauma Symptoms of Discrimination Scale, Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, General Ethnic Discrimination Scale, Schedule of Racist Event, the Everyday Discrimination Scale)

Strategies for Self-Care As You Do the Work of Confronting Bias

Collective coping

- Seek connection and support from family, friends, and one's racial community
- Establish personal and professional networks (e.g., mentoring)
- Racial microaffirmations: verbal and nonverbal strategies that affirm one's values, integrity, and humanity
- Humor and laughter to reduce the power of racial microaggressions and bond with others

Resistance coping

- Challenge/resist White, Eurocentric normative behaviors (i.e., individual and systemic)
- Defy stereotypes with authenticity (e.g., wearing one's natural hair)
- Confront perpetrators directly when it feels safe to do so (e.g., calling in, naming microaggressions, education, humor)

Self-protective coping

- Seek supervision (i.e., process and validation)
- Utilize basic self-care activities
- Engage in culturally relevant practices that reestablish pride in one's racial group and reminds one of their strength
- Organized religion (e.g., church) and spirituality
- Desensitize, avoid, and disengage to minimize stress associated with racial microaggressions

(Spanierman et al., 2021)

Responding to Microaggressions Against the Therapist

Therapists also encounter microaggressions in therapy!

- According to research conducted by Branco and Bayne (2020), “counselors of color carry a burden of experiencing microaggressions within the counseling setting, expending mental and emotional energy to determine whether to ignore, address, or simply own the experience of racial microaggressions in counseling” (p. 275). These burdens are associated with several themes, including:
 - Buffering and bracing for racial microaggressions
 - Experiencing the intrusions of racial microaggressions
 - Strategizing and responding in session
- Findings from research with counseling students with LGBT+ identities suggest therapists with LGBT+ identities may specifically experience microaggressions around issues such as misgendering, heteronormativity, and anti-LGBT slurs that might prompt questions as to whether one should disclose their identity and concerns about safety (Bryan, 2018)

Microinterventions

Responding to microaggressions requires a balance between dealing with bias and maintaining one's sense of psychological safety

- **Microinterventions** are defined as “the everyday words or deeds, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate to targets of microaggressions (a) validation of their experiential reality, (b) value as a person, (c) affirmation of their racial or group identity, (d) support and encouragement, and (e) reassurance that they are not alone” (Sue et al., 2019, p. 134)
- Microintervention enhance psychological well-being, and provide targets, allies, and bystanders with a sense of control and self-efficacy
- Categories of microinterventions:
 - Microaffirmations
 - Microprotections
 - Microchallenges (Sue et al., 2021)

Microaffirmations

- **Microaffirmations** are small acts that affirm an individual's identity, experiential reality, or worth
 - Examples of microaffirmations include statements designed to support targets of discrimination, such as the anti-racist statements put out by many organizations in the wake of recent social unrest and police brutality, or words of validation commonly shared among targets and allies such as "I see you."
 - Research exploring the impact of microaffirmations with transgender clients suggests these clients feel affirmed in their identities when: (1) microaggressions were absent, (2) cisnormativity is acknowledged, (3) cisnormativity is disrupted, and (4) authentic gender is seen (Anzani et al., 2019)
 - Similar steps can be taken by individuals within clinical practices/organizations to reduce the experience of microaggressions in the workplace

Microprotections

- **Microprotections** refer to proactive measures taken by influential figures to teach others about the reality of racism, promote cultural pride, and equip others to challenge bias and discrimination
- These interventions occur between members of the same social identity and include traditional empowerment strategies such as consciousness-raising and teaching skills to deal with racism

Microchallenges

- **Microchallenges** are direct actions taken to challenge biased and oppressive behaviors, policies, and practices
- They may include directly confronting perpetrators, social advocacy, and civil disobedience such as protests or boycotts
 - Reframing and redirecting the client
 - Trying to understand the client in their context (client worldview)
 - Responding directly to the client (Branco & Bayne, 2020)

Specific Microchallenges

- Specific microchallenge tactics include:
 - Make the invisible visible: “Are you saying...”
 - Disarm the microaggression: “I don’t agree with what you said” or “Ouch!”
 - Educate the offender: “I know you didn’t realize this but...”

Challenging Microaggressions

Allies can disrupt microaggressions

- Allies are people who recognize the unearned privilege they receive from society's patterns of injustice and take action to change it. For example, allies may be:
 - White people who work to end racism
 - Men who challenge sexism
 - Heterosexual people who fight against heterosexism/ homophobia
 - Non-indigenous people who actively engage in decolonizing processes (Williams & Sharif, 2021, p. 1)

Facets of Allyship

Allies draw attention to the problem and support the target

- Facets of allyship from the Interpersonal Racial Ally Scale (IRAS; Williams & Sharif, 2021):
 - Demonstrate understanding of institutional racism and White privilege
 - Self-reflection about own racism and positionality
 - Express responsibility and commitment to use racial privilege to promote equity
 - Engaging in actions to disrupt racism
 - Coalition building and working in solidarity with people of color
 - Encountering resistance from other White people

Recognizing Saviorship

Allies act “with” rather than “on behalf” of target groups

- Allies should be distinguished from what some have termed as saviors
 - Saviors refer to those who engage in performative acts of helping others for their own benefit or recognition. Sometimes also referred to as virtue signaling.
- Signs of saviorship include:
 - Having a charity model or a paternalistic view of helping others who are considered less fortunate
 - Maintaining social distance
 - Being low in power sharing
 - Failing to actively deconstruct internalized superiority in one’s worldview or way of being (Williams & Sharif, 2021)

Specific Microchallenges

- Specific microchallenge tactics include:
 - Make the invisible visible: “Are you saying...”
 - Disarm the microaggression: “I don’t agree with what you said” or “Ouch!”
 - Educate the offender: “I know you didn’t realize this but...” (Sue et al., 2019)

Your Seat on the Bus

“Allies actively examine their metaphorical ‘seat at the front of the bus’ and find ways to be disloyal to systems that assign these seats” (Williams & Sharif, 2021, p. 2)

- What self-reflections are significant regarding your own privilege and positionality?
- What microaffirmations, microprotections, and/or microchallenges can you offer targeted individuals in your work environment and/or among your clients?



Join Us For Future Events!



Broaching as a Strategy to Address Implicit Bias in Mental Health

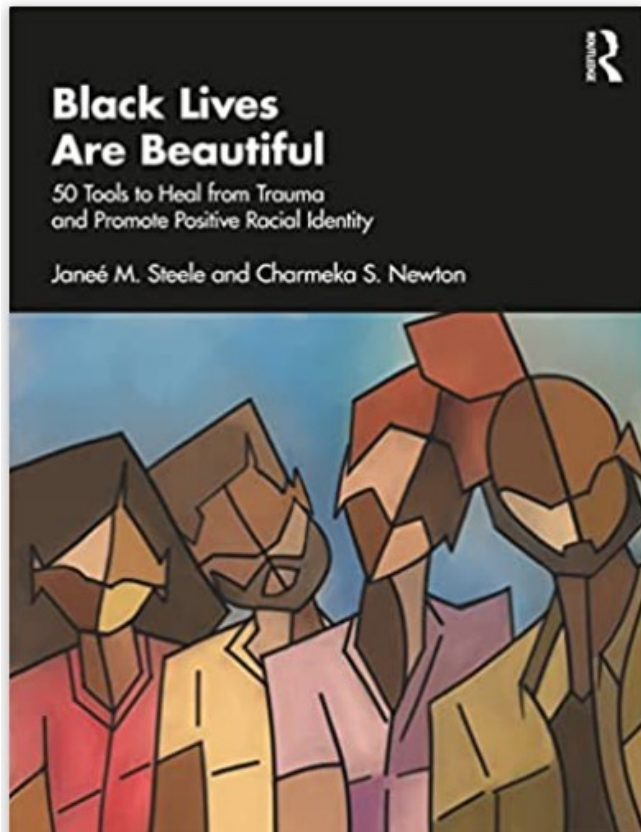
Thursday, August 24, 2023
12pm - 1pm ET

Live Zoom Webinar

Featuring:
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