Racial Microaggressions

Identification and Treatment in the Counseling Relationship

Kimberly Harris, MA
Nivischi N. Edwards, PhD, LMHC, NCC, DCC, BC-TMH
Liberty University

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1. Racial Microaggressions
2. Racial Microaggression Trauma
3. Culturally Informed Treatment
4. Microinterventions
5. Facilitating Racial Microaggressions Workshops
Learning Objectives: Knowledge

1. Define Racial microaggressions (RMAS), RMAS trauma, and the impact it has on POC
2. Cultural Awareness and obligation to continually evaluate personal bias
3. Initiate conversations about race/ethnicity/culture in counseling
4. Address RMAS-- A lifestyle, not a job
5. Provide psychoeducation and instruction on how to respond to RMAS with clients
Learning Objectives: Skills

1. Engage in Personal-Awareness Assessments
2. Broach race/ethnicity/culture in counseling sessions
   • Initiate conversation on r/e/c
   • Apply interventions to treat RRT
3. Cultural Awareness Preparedness
   • Engage microintervention as an ally
   • Engage microintervention as a victim
   • Receive microintervention as a perpetrator
4. Teach clients how to respond RMAS
Learning Objectives: Training

1. Instruction & discussion on RMAS
2. Learn tactics
3. Brief discussion with partner/group
4. Switch roles
   (repeat until all members have had a turn at being the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystander/ally)
5. Debrief with entire workshop
Section I

Knowledge
A racial microaggression is a term used for brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward racial/ethnic/cultural minority groups (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007).

Social scientists Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007) describe microaggressions as "the new face of racism", saying that the nature of racism has shifted over time from overt expressions of racial hatred and hate crimes, toward expressions of aversive racism, such as microaggressions, that are more subtle, ambiguous, and often unintentional.
Audience Survey

• Have not heard the terminology?
• Have heard the terminology and is unsure of the definition?
• Able to define the terminology and disagree that it is real?
• Aware of the terminology and have been an aggressor?
• Believe in the terminology and have experienced it?
• Is actively involved in changing the paradigm of this terminology?
## Impact of Racial Microaggressions

### Mental Health
- Depression
- Anxiety/Hypervigilance/Hyperarousal
- Individual and Family Stress
- Avoidance
- Suicidal ideation
- Increased Traumatic Stress Symptoms

### Physical Health
- Reduced trust in health care system
- Hypertension
- Heart disease
- Heart attacks
- Type 2 diabetes
- Obesity
Macroaggressions

- Racial microaggressions delivered environmentally through social media, educational curriculum, TV programs, mascots, monuments, and other offensive symbols.

(Sue et al., 2019)
Impact of Racial Macroaggressions

• Injustices in Education (i.e. access, achievement)
• Injustices in the Healthcare (i.e. access, treatment interventions)
• Injustices in Criminal Justice (i.e. harsher punishments)
• Racial Bias from police officers and other professionals
• Injustices in Occupational (access, inequality)
• Intersectionality (race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, disability)
• Racial Battle Fatigue
Communication that indicates how verbal information should be interpreted; stimuli surrounding the verbal communication that also have meaning, which may, or may not, be congruent with that of or support the verbal talk.

Hidden messages communicated with microaggression

Common Messages

- You are servants
- You are invaluable
- You are an outsider
- You are deviant or a criminal
- You are a lesser being
- You are not American

(Sue et. al., 2019)
“Oh she is so pretty for a Black girl!”

“When I look at you, I don’t see color…”

“As a woman, I know what you go through as a minority…”

“You’re so articulate!”

A Black woman approaches a door where males of differing racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds are exiting and the male acts as if she is invisible. The door slams in her face.

“There is only one race, the human race.”
### Metacommunication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Hidden Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “Oh she is so pretty for a Black girl!”</td>
<td>1. Black women are not usually beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “When I look at you, I don’t see color…”</td>
<td>2. Denying a person of color racial/ethnic experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “As a woman, I know what you go through as a minority…”</td>
<td>3. Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can’t be racist, I’m just like you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Metacommunication Continued

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<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Hidden Message</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. “You’re so articulate!”</td>
<td>1. It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A Black woman approaches a door where males of a differing racial/ethnic/cultural background is exiting. He acts as if she is invisible. The door slams in her face.</td>
<td>2. Black women are not worthy of being acknowledged or treated like other women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “There is only one race, the human race.”</td>
<td>3. Assimilate/acculturate to the dominant culture</td>
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Taxonomy

- Microassaults
- Microinsults
- Microinvalidations

(Sue et. al., 2007)
Microassaults

- Microassaults are *conscious* biased beliefs or attitudes held by people and *intentionally* expressed *overtly* or *covertly* toward marginalized groups.

- Microassaults hurt the intended victim through *name-calling*, *avoidant behavior*, or *purposeful discriminatory actions* such as using *racial epithets*, displaying a *swastika* or hanging a *noose surreptitiously* on the door of a *black colleague*. (Sue et. al., 2007)
Microinsults

• Actions (verbal, nonverbal, or environmental) that convey insensitivity, rudeness, or demeans a person’s racial identity or heritage.

• The power that these racial microaggressions have to hurt and oppress students of color are also due to their “invisible” nature and daily occurrences.

(Sue et. al., 2007)
- Microinvalidations are statements that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color, such as:
  - “Where were you born?” or, “You speak good English.”
  - These imply, “You are not American.”

(Sue et. al., 2007)
“The bombardment of racial micro/macroaggressions in the lives of POC has been described as a chronic state of “racial battle fatigue” that taxes the resources of target groups” (Sue et. al., 2019).
What Can We Do?

- Create a safe space
- Employ culturally competent intake processes
- Engage in culturally competent counseling
- Develop skills to identify, address and treat RMAS trauma
- Provide clients with skills for responding to and experiencing RMAS trauma

(Sue et. al., 2019)
Experiencing Racial Microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007)
Prevalence
Racial
Microaggressions

(FBI, 2018)
Institutional Racial Microaggressions

Macroaggressions

Structural, environmental, and institutional racial microaggressions.

(Sue et al., 2019)
Think - Pair - Share

1. Take a moment to think about it

2. Talk about it with a partner(s) - 4 maximum

3. Share insights with the group at large
Reasons for Addressing Racial Microaggressions

Impact of inaction

• Inaction supports and proliferates biased perpetrator behaviors.

• A lack of action or paralysis leads to later rumination about the situation and negative self-evaluations.

• Internalizing prevalent racist attitudes and negative beliefs about oneself.

(Sue et. al., 2019)
## Difficulties in Addressing Racial Microaggressions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Bystanders</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Allies</th>
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| • Diffusion of responsibility; fear of retaliation; fear of losing friends; not wanting to get involved; and anticipated negative consequences have all been proposed as inhibiting active bystanders | • Sting of prejudice and discrimination pains them; experience is jarring—experience “freeze effect”; ambiguity of RMAS; lack of support; helplessness; hopelessness; resolved to experiencing discrimination/racism practices or behaviors | • Fatigue  
• Fragility  
• Negative impact  
• Possibility of being labeled  
• “How do I respond?”                                                   |
Whose *Role* is it anyway?

- **Targets**
  People of Color who are objects of racial prejudice and discrimination expressed through micro/macroaggressions

- **White Allies**
  Individuals who belong to dominant society social groups and through their support of nondominant groups actively work toward the eradication of prejudicial practices they witness in both their personal and professional lives.

- **Bystanders**
  Anyone who becomes aware of and/or witnesses unjust behavior or practices that are worthy of comment or action.

- **Perpetrator/Aggressor**
  Anyone who consciously/unconsciously engages in perpetuating racial microaggressions against people of color (operational for this workshop)

- **Counselor/Therapist**
  Provide culturally congruent therapeutic approaches
  - Validate experiences of racial microaggressions and associated trauma
  - Broach race/ethnicity/culture BEFORE client to encourage openness and demonstrate awareness

(Day-Vines, Wood, Grotheaus, Craigen, Holman, Dotson-Blake, & Douglass, 2007; Sue et. al., 2019)
Counselor’s Role

- Multicultural Competence
- Culturally/Ethnically/Racially Informed Intake Processes
- Address differences between our experiences
- Apply Culturally/Ethnically/Racially appropriate treatments, assessments, diagnoses
- Continuously engage in self-awareness and training to enhance skills to respond to growing populations within our communities
- VALIDATE racial experiential realities

(Davis, DeBlaere, Brubaker, Owen, Jordan II, Hook, & Van Tongeren, 2014; Day-Vines, Ammah, Steen, & Arnold, 2018; Malott, & Schaefle, 2015; Miller, TaeHyuk Keum, Thai, Lu, Truong, Huh, Li, Yeung, & HaRim Ahn, 2018)
## Multicultural Competence in Counseling

<table>
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<th>Multicultural Competence (MCC)</th>
<th>Multicultural Orientation</th>
<th>Cultural Humility</th>
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<td>A counselor’s acquired knowledge, skills and abilities for working with culturally diverse clients.</td>
<td>A counselor’s way of being with a client, guided by the counselor’s philosophy, or values about the importance of culture in the lives of his or her clients.</td>
<td>An important facet of cultural orientation that involves the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the client.</td>
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Addressing RMAS in Counseling

Stage I: Counselor multicultural and racial competencies

Awareness
  • personal bias

Knowledge
  • client’s worldview
  • culturally aligned interventions
  • historical and current sociocultural experiences
  • recognition of unique traits & experiences, both within & across groups
  • significant race & racial privileges
  • awareness of White norms & personal systemic racism

(Malott & Schaefle, 2014)
Addressing RMAS in Counseling Cont’d

Stage II: Counselor multicultural and racial competencies

Skills

• Cross-racial case conceptualization
• Counseling models & approaches

(Malott & Schaefle, 2014)
Addressing RMAS in Counseling Cont’d

Stage III: Skills initiating the conversation

Skills:
- Eliciting
- Broaching

Stage IV: Interventions

- Enhancing identity
- Specific *responsive* strategies
- TIC

(Malott & Schaefle, 2014)
Address the evident differences

Through...

Broaching the subject of race/ethnicity/culture with clients
Initiate conversations about race/ethnicity/culture

Apologize if you are guilty of having engaged in a microaggression
Admit you may have erred and genuinely inquire about learning more to foster strong therapeutic alliance

(Day-Vines, Ammah, Steen, & Arnold, 2018; Malott, & Schaefle, 2015)
Integrate Cultural Humility & MCC

• Competence communicates an endpoint
• Humility is constant
• Deepens the therapeutic alliance
• Improves the therapeutic process
• Integrate the two
• More culturally humble counselor

(Hook, 2014)
Principles of Cultural Humility

• Self reflection
• Learning from the client
• Promotion of partnership building
• Lifelong Learning

(Goforth, 2016)
Validate - Validate - Validate!

Through...

1. Counselor multicultural and racial competencies
2. Counseling frameworks
3. Skills in initiating the conversation
4. Interventions
5. Cultural Humility
Check on Learning

- Racial Microaggressions?
  - Taxonomy?
  - Impact on POC?
  - Impact of Inaction?

- What’s the counselor's role?
  - How?
  - Tools?
  - Skills?
Microinterventions are everyday words or deeds, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates the following to targets of racial microaggressions:

- Validation of their experiential reality
- Value as a person
- Affirmation of their racial or group identity
- Support and encouragement
- Reassurance that they are not alone

2 Primary Functions:

- Enhance psychological well-being & provide targets, allies, and bystanders with a sense of control and self-efficacy
- Provide a repertoire of responses that can be used to directly disarm or counteract the effects of microaggressions by challenging perpetrators.

(Sue et al., 2019)
Framework for Microinterventions

(Sue et. al., 2019)
Strategic Goals

- Make the invisible visible
- Disarm the microaggression
- Educate the offender about the metacommunications they send
- Seek external support when needed

(Sue et al., 2019)
Triads/ Quadrats – Role Play Time
BREAKTIME
Section III

Training
Facilitating an RMAS Workshop

- Allot approximately 1 to 1 1/2 hours for workshop

- The workshop should begin with an introduction to racial microaggressions, explaining the definitions, providing examples, their impact on mental and physical health, and highlighting the reasons why confrontation is necessary.

- Discuss the importance of identifying goals and roles in responding to RMAS.

- Discuss strategies for responding to RMAS.

- Engage in role play with pairs of two or in triads. If using pairs, simply engage in perpetrator and target roles. If using triads, roles may be assigned as perpetrator, target, and ally. If quadrats are used, perpetrator, target, ally, and bystander roles may be used.

(Byrd, 2018)
Review the Goals for Addressing Racial Microaggressions

The resolution the individual target, bystander, or ally is seeking will determine their goals

• To release anger, or frustration
• To interrupt a situation, or disarm the microaggression
• To educate the offender
• To seek external support, or enlist help from others
• To make the “invisible” visible

(Byrd, 2018)
Situational Factors

• Aggressor’s level of prejudice and personality factors
• Environmental factors
• Personal dynamics/Relationship dynamics
• Type of bias

(Byrd, 2018)
Intervention Tactics

- Appeal to values
- Express your feelings
- Get aggressor to explain
- Empathize with the underlying feeling of the aggressor
- Give information that contradicts the aggressor or gives a new perspective on the issue
- Use humor or an exclamation
- Involve others-- Seek external support/reinforcements
- Nonverbal response

(Byrd, 2018)
Strategic Goal: Educate the Offender

Through...

- Engaging in one-on-one dialogue with offender to share exactly how and why behavior/inaction is offensive
- Facilitating enlightening conversation and explore offender’s bias
- Encouraging offender to explore the origins of their beliefs/attitudes towards target(s)
TACTIC: Appeal to Values

Example

• “I’ve always thought of you as an open-minded person who wouldn’t say things like that.”

-- This works to induce feelings of guilt in the aggressor

(Byrd, 2018)
TACTIC: Express your feelings

This approach works towards perspective-taking and to create empathy, which has been shown to reduce stereotyping and the denial of discrimination.

This strategy can also induce the value-behavior discrepancy, especially when the target and aggressor have a close relationship and, or, the remark/action was meant as a joke.

Example: “OUCH! That really hurt!”
Use I-Statements: “I feel pretty offended by your comment.”

(Byrd, 2018)
TACTIC: Empathize with the underlying feeling

“I know it’s hard to find a job after college, but affirmative action isn’t the problem.”

Using empathy can help aggressors see the target as having similar values and promote inclusion.

Affirming the aggressors can reduce feelings of threat, which has shown to reduce bias in intergroup interactions and make aggressors more willing to acknowledge guilt over biased action.

(Byrd, 2018)
Strategic Goal: Make the “invisible” visible

Through...

• Bringing the microaggression to the forefront of the offender’s awareness
• Striking back, defending yourself-- or coming to the defense of others
• Indicating to offender their behavior or communication is offensive
• Forcing offender to consider the impact & meaning of their behavior or communication
TACTIC: Give Information that contradicts the aggressor or gives a new perspective on the issue.

Providing counter-stereotypic information about one’s self is a form of individuation that can be effective for reducing prejudice.

Targets can also present statistics or data that contradicts the aggressor by explaining the facts. This strategy requires a high-level of preparation, as the ‘confronter’ will need to be familiar with relevant data.

(Byrd, 2018)
TACTIC: Get the Aggressor to explain

"Why did you say that?"

“What did you mean by that?”

‘Play dumb’– and ask for further information

This can be useful in highlighting logical inconsistencies in the aggressor’s words or uncovering unconscious bias

(Byrd, 2018)
TACTIC: Use Humor

• This works to reduce defensiveness compared to more challenging approaches, but it also strongly relies on the confronter’s personality.

• EXAMPLE: “Whoa... racist much, Bob?!?”

(Byrd, 2018)
Strategic Goal: Disarm the Microaggression

Through...

• Stopping, or deflecting the microaggression
• Forcing the offender to immediately consider why they have said or done
• Communicating disagreement or disapproval towards offender in the moment
• Forcing offender to consider the impact and meaning of what was said/done, or, in the case of bystander, what was not said or, done
TACTIC: Express your feelings

This approach works towards perspective-taking and to create empathy, which has been shown to reduce stereotyping, and the denial of discrimination.

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(Byrd, 2018)
Strategic Goal: Seek External Reinforcements

Through...
● Alerting Leadership
● Reporting incidents
● Engaging in counseling/therapy

When no one responds to prejudiced comments, a community norm allowing those comments is set.

Involving others can be a strategy to invoke safety in numbers to highlight the norm violation to the aggressor

(Byrd, 2018)
TACTIC: Non-verbal responses

- A look
- A sigh
- A perplexed brown scrunch
- A head nod/shake

These can be impactful without requiring a high level of preparation or energy from the confronter.

(Byrd, 2018)
Processing Responses

1. In your group - Share a personal story of how you may have encountered or engaged in racial microaggressions and identify which type of microaggression was used.

2. Talk about what you believe your role/responsibility is, as it relates to racial microaggressions, and what tools you may use to support a client who presents with a need for support in this area.

3. What is your biggest take away from this workshop? Why?
Processing Responses

1. How have you experienced microaggressions in your own life?
2. How might you have enacted microaggressions?
3. How do microaggressions show up in your work?
References


Contact Information

Kimberly Harris - kharris146@liberty.edu

Nivischi N. Edwards - nedwards10@liberty.edu