

UNPACKING THE IMPACT OF THE CYCLE OF SOCIALIZATION AND GENERATIONAL TRAUMA ON THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

Beyond Cultural Sensitivity

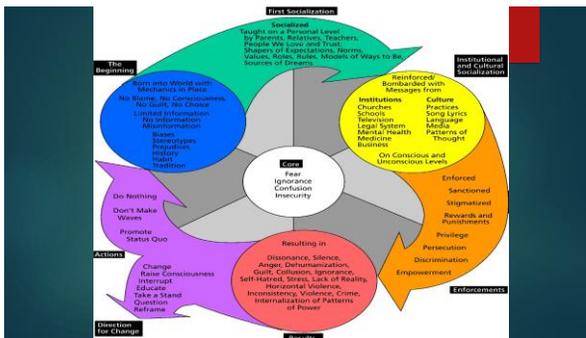
Brittany Patterson, LCSW
britt030480@gmail.com

1

Training Objectives

- ▶ Gain a full understanding of the cycle of socialization and its role in our lives
- ▶ Identify propaganda at work in the life of a social worker stemming from both media outlets and personal upbringing
- ▶ Define and identify microaggressions in client and collegial relationships
- ▶ Identify the impact of specific historical events on the community in which we live and work
- ▶ Practice addressing the complexities of cultural differences and power differences in the therapeutic relationship

2



3

Unpacking our first socialization

- Socialization begins in the home with "kitchen table propaganda"
- What are the messages in your family that were so strong they didn't need to be stated?
- The brain is like a fertile garden, whatever is planted, whether it be weeds or beautiful flowers, it will grow.
- What does your fertile garden look like? Have you done any pruning or weeding since entering the field of social work?

4

Laura Brown, PhD, "Treating complex stress disorders", on Cultural bias

"As people of goodwill, psychotherapists tend to see themselves as nonjudgmental and lacking in malignant bias. They are, in many instances trained to become aware of their judgments and to let them go, and cautioned to maintain neutral, objective stances in relationship to clients. This narrative of the unbiased, nonjudgmental therapist is deadly to the development of cultural competence, because it presumes a way of being that is difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

The notion that a therapist can be unbiased, presumes the absence of limbic system input, as well as of any personal life history that has ascribed meaning to difference, either positive or otherwise. No psychotherapist matches these criteria."

5

Addressing cultural bias

- This socialization is powerful and weeds can be persistent
- Per the NASW code of ethics: Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems. Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person. Social workers challenge social injustice. Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise
- How do we operationalize these ethical principles if we don't weed out the garden?
- We must be aware of our bias and address it consistently.
- We cannot move forward unless we are honest about where we are.

6

Unpacking institutional and cultural socialization

- ▶ What weeds have been watered and cultivated by your surroundings?
- ▶ What are the messages of propaganda at work in our greater society on the meso and macro levels?
- ▶ Are you aware and alert to the subliminal messaging in our media and institutional structures that are bombarding you with messages everyday?
- ▶ What are the strategies that are being used to maintain the status quo?
- ▶ How are our client relationships, collegial relationships, and agency structures being affected?
- ▶ What is our role as social workers to stand up against these structures?

7

Ian Haney Lopez, "Dog Whistle Politics" on strategic racism

Strategic racism refers to purposeful efforts to use racial animus as leverage to gain material wealth, political power or heightened social standing.....How did racism first arise? Hate for different races cannot explain where racism comes from for this would be entirely circular. Instead notions of race were invented, and racial hatred stimulated, to justify exploitation. In the context of colonial North America...European immigrants began to invent ideas about "racial differences" in order to justify treatment of the indigenous populations on the Eastern seaboard as well as those from Western Africa.....

8

Strategic racism cont.

For almost everyone, it is wrenching to encounter, let alone participate in the level of intense suffering associated with driving persons from their homes or forcing people into bondage. If, however, we can convince ourselves that our victims are not like us- do not feel pain the way we do, are not intelligent or sensitive, indeed are indolent, degenerate, violent, and dangerous- then perhaps we're not doing so much harm after all, indeed more than protecting ourselves, maybe we are helping the benighted others....Exploitation can be more easily justified if the exploited are placed within a fixed hierarchy- a natural or divine division of the population into superior and inferior. Gender traditionally works this way...Indifferent settings, caste, religion, language, ethnicity, and class, among others, all provide markers of difference sufficiently deep to justify appalling abuse. These various forms of differentiation work in discrete ways, but also share a fundamental similarity: they are the stories societies tell themselves to justify violent exploitation. In the U.S. race provides such a core story, and strategic racists are the master narrators.

9

Strategic Racism cont.

- ▶ These strategies were designed to be low maintenance. The strategies were put in place to be self sustaining. Policies and laws to disempower certain groups were put in place and we must be aware of these structures and how they impact our clients and ourselves.
- ▶ What are the specific historical events that impact people in your community and that might be affecting your therapeutic relationships?
- ▶ We are all affected by the legacy of Atrocious Cultural Experiences and need to be aware of the impact so as to dismantle it

10

Trauma definitions

-  **Trauma:** An exceptional experience in which powerful and dangerous stimuli overwhelm the person's development and regulatory capacity with insufficient resources to cope with the experience.
-  **Intergenerational Trauma:** The transmission of trauma from survivors to subsequent generations that is passed through parenting practices (parents give off danger signals without giving the explanation), emotional/behavioral problems within the family or community, story telling
-  **Historical trauma:** Cumulative emotional and psychological effects of felt experience passed on to the next generation through DNA and learned experience

11

Ta-Nehisi Coates- Notes from the fourth year

ANY FAIR CONSIDERATION OF THE DEPTH AND WIDTH OF ENSLAVEMENT TEMPTS INSANITY.....

12

Intergenerational trauma vs. intergenerational healing

- ▶ We are a nation of immigrants how does your immigration story differ from your client populations? Voluntary vs involuntary
- ▶ How does your coming of age experience differ from your client populations? Sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, race, culture
- ▶ How does your experience of independence and achieving the "American dream" differ from your client populations?



13

Being aware of and addressing microaggressions

- ▶ **Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person or group.** (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, Torino, 2007)
- ▶ Microaggressions can also be delivered environmentally through the physical surroundings of target groups, where they are made to feel unwelcome, isolated, unsafe, and alienated.
- ▶ Addressing microaggressions can be challenging as the perpetrator is often unaware of their actions as hurtful and the victim must decide if an microaggression has actually occurred- This can lead to a "gaslighting" dynamic

14

Dynamics of Microaggressions

The Clash of Sociodemographic Realities

- Individuals from different racial, cultural, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and ability backgrounds do not necessarily share the same experiences
- Perceptions around sociodemographic differences held by the dominant group differ significantly from those of marginalized groups
- Studies show that many whites believe that racism is no longer prevalent in society and not important to the lives of people of color (D.W. Sue 2007), that heterosexuals believe that homophobia is a thing of the past and that antigay harassment is on the decline (Morrison and Morrison, 2002), and that men (and women) assert that women have achieved equal status and are no longer discriminated against (Swim and Cohen, 1997)

15

Dynamics of Microaggressions

The Invisibility of Unintentional Expressions of Bias

- "Color Blind" ideology- the new racism
- That a microaggression is essentially invisible to the perpetrator creates a psychological dilemma for victims that can leave them frustrated, feeling powerless, and even questioning their own sanity.
- The question for the victim of any microaggression is how to prove that one actually occurred and how to make the perpetrator aware of it

16

Dynamics of Microaggressions

Perceived Minimal Harm

- ▶ When a perpetrator is confronted about a microaggression they may say that the victim is overreacting or has taken it the wrong way
- ▶ The invalidation of the victim's feelings is particularly damaging
- ▶ The impact of the microaggression is significantly amplified if it occurs within a preexisting negative, marginalizing, and/or oppressive climate creating such feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation on the part of the victim.

17

Dynamics of Microaggressions

The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions

- Did what I think happened really happen?
- Was this a deliberate act or an unintentional slight?
- How should I respond?
- What are the consequences if I confront it?
- If I bring up the topic, how do I prove it? Is it really worth it to try and prove it?
- Should I just drop the matter?

Sometimes the only evidence is the victim's felt experience and interpretation. Isn't that enough?

18

Categories of Microaggressions

Microassaults: explicit, derogatory, and violent verbal or nonverbal attacks that are intended to hurt, degrade, and discriminate against a person.

Microinsults: behaviors or demeaning verbal remarks that convey rudeness.

Microinvalidations: comments or behaviors that negate or dismiss the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target person or group.

19

Microaggressive acts...

- ▶ Tend to be subtle, unintentional, and indirect
- ▶ Often occur in situations where there are alternative explanations
- ▶ Represent unconscious and ingrained biased beliefs and attitudes (weeds in your garden)
- ▶ Are more likely to occur when people pretend not to notice differences, thereby denying that race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, and disability has anything to do with their actions.

20

Microaggressions and implications for practice

- ▶ Given that social workers tend to think of themselves as just, fair, and non-discriminating it can be difficult for us to recognize when we commit microaggressions that may be unhelpful and even oppressive
- ▶ Because all people inherit biases toward various identity groups through cultural conditioning in the U.S., no one, including social workers is immune. Therefore dynamics related to differences are often recreated and reenacted between social worker and client
- ▶ We must be aware of what we bring into the therapy room and how these biases impact our assessment, treatment planning, and interventions with clients as well as our relationships with colleagues.

21

Ancient Ethics for Today's Healers -- GERAL BLANCHARD

- ▶ The most potent medicine is the truth of who we are and bringing that authenticity and integrity to each healing experience....Further, universal striving and struggling become the compass of a growing person. If we present ourselves as if we are "past all that", healed and whole, that deception, and it is a deception, often of ourselves as much as of others--can be far more dangerous than the acknowledgment of our personal brokenness. And if we are not self-aware, we will be limited in our ability to help others reach their destination. Relationship to self is the prelude to a relationship with our fellow man.

25

References and suggested reading

- ▶ Multicultural Social Work Practice, a competency based approach to diversity and social justice, Second Edition by Derald Wing Sue, Mikal N. Rasheed, Janice M. Rasheed
- ▶ Inside out and Outside in, Psychodynamic clinical theory and psychopathology in contemporary multicultural contexts by Joan Bertoff, Laura Melano Flanagan, Patricia Hertz
- ▶ Dog Whistle Politics, how coded racial appeals have reinvented racism and wrecked the middle class by Ian Haney Lopez
- ▶ We Were Eight Years in Power- An American Tragedy by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- ▶ Film: Wilmington on Fire by Chris Everett
- ▶ The Deepest Well- Healing the Long Term effects of Childhood Adversity by Nadine Burke Harris
- ▶ Film: The Color of Fear by Lee Mun

26