

The background of the slide is a dark purple gradient. It features several large, light purple circles of varying sizes. In the top right corner, there is a solid pink rectangle.

Identifying and Addressing Microaggressions in and out of Therapy



Identifying and Addressing Microaggressions

OBJECTIVES:

- (a) DEFINE MICROAGGRESSIONS
- (b) IDENTIFY DIFFERENT TYPES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS
- (c) LEARN ABOUT DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF MICROAGGRESSIONS
- (d) RECOGNIZE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN MICROAGGRESSIONS AND OUR ETHICAL CODE
- (e) LEARN SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES FOR IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions



- ▶ Brief, commonplace, and subtle verbal and nonverbal slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages directed toward an individual due to their **group identity**, often automatically and unconsciously. These indignities communicate hostility toward groups that have been historically marginalized.
- ▶ Usually committed by well-intentioned folks who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated.
- ▶ Similar to carbon monoxide - *“invisible, but potentially lethal”* - continuous exposure to these type of interactions *“can be a sort of death by a thousand cuts to the victim”*

► Sue, 2010



Modern racism

- ▶ “...one must not look for the gross and obvious. The subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today’s racism”
(Pierce, 1974, p. 516)

Microaggressions in Everyday Life

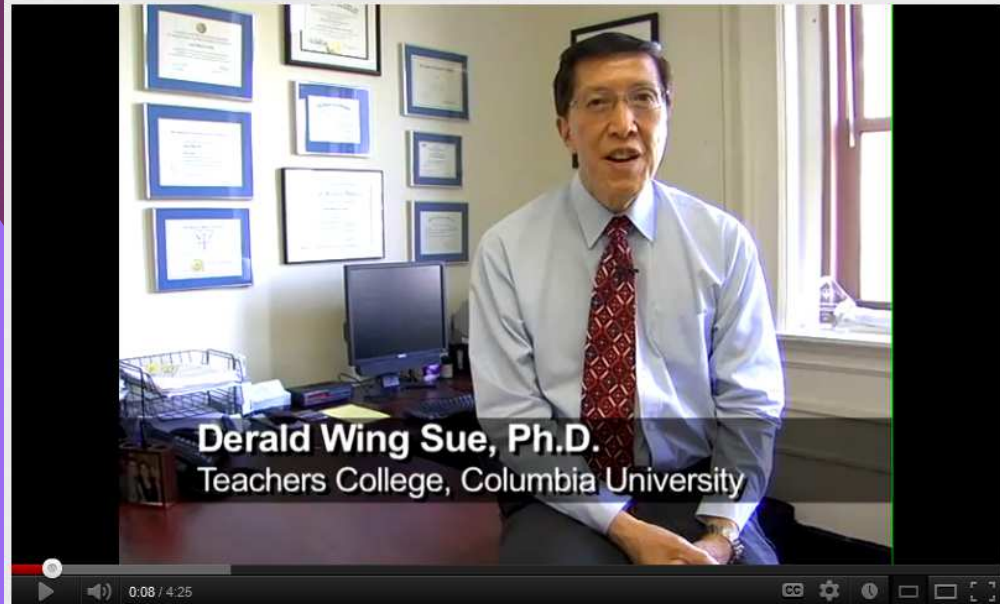
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4>

Microaggressions in Everyday Life

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Microaggressions in Everyday Life

Race, Gender, and
Sexual Orientation

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Microaggressions and Marginality

Manifestation, Dynamics, and Impact



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Types of Microaggressions

Microinsult: Often unconscious verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's heritage or identity

- ▶ Ex: joking that you cannot give female office worker constructive feedback or she'll cry, "helping" a wheelchair user without asking if they need assistance

Microassault: Explicit verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discrimination.

- ▶ Ex: "I don't get that tranny. Should I call it a he or a she?"

Microinvalidation: Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person's identity

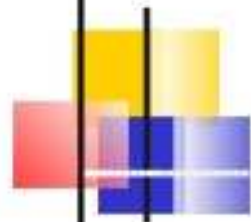
- ▶ Ex: color blindness, pictures that represent organizations are homogenous

Microinequities: Individuals are "either singled out, or overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted" based on an unchangeable characteristic .


- ▶ Ex: "You're a lesbian, what do you think?"; constantly interrupting a woman; change in body position

Table 1: Examples of Racial Microaggressions

Themes	Microaggression	Message
Alien in Own Land When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born	"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" "You speak good English." "A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language."	You are not American. You are a foreigner.
Ascription of Intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color based on their race	"You are a credit to your race." "You are so articulate." Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem	People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.
Color Blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race	"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a Melting Pot" "There is only one race, the human race"	Denying a person of color's racial/ethnic experiences. Assimilate/acculturate to dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.



<p>Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race</p>	<p>A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes.</p> <p>A store owner following a customer of color around the store.</p> <p>A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it.</p>	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are going to steal/ You are poor/ You do not belong.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p>
<p>Denial of Individual Racism A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases.</p>	<p>"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."</p> <p>"As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."</p>	<p>I am immune to racism because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p>
<p>Myth of Meritocracy Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes.</p>	<p>"I believe the most qualified person should get the job"</p> <p>"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</p>	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>
<p>Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/ White culture are ideal.</p>	<p>Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."</p> <p>To an Asian or Latino person: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal."</p> <p>"Speak up more."</p> <p>Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting</p>	<p>Assimilate to dominant culture.</p> <p>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p>



<p>Second Class Citizen</p> <p>Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a Person of color</p>	<p>Person of color mistaken for a service worker.</p> <p>Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger</p> <p>Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind you</p> <p>"You people..."</p>	<p>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high status positions. You are likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood.</p> <p>Whites are more valued customers than people of color. You don't belong. You are a lesser being.</p>
<p>Environmental</p> <p>Microaggressions</p> <p>Macro-level Microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels</p>	<p>A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males</p> <p>Television shows and movies that feature predominantly White programs, without representation of people of color</p> <p>Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color</p> <p>Overabundance of liquor stores in communities of color</p>	<p>You don't belong/ You won't succeed here. There is only so far you can go.</p> <p>You are an outsider/ You don't exist.</p> <p>People of color don't/shouldn't value education.</p> <p>People of color are deviant.</p>

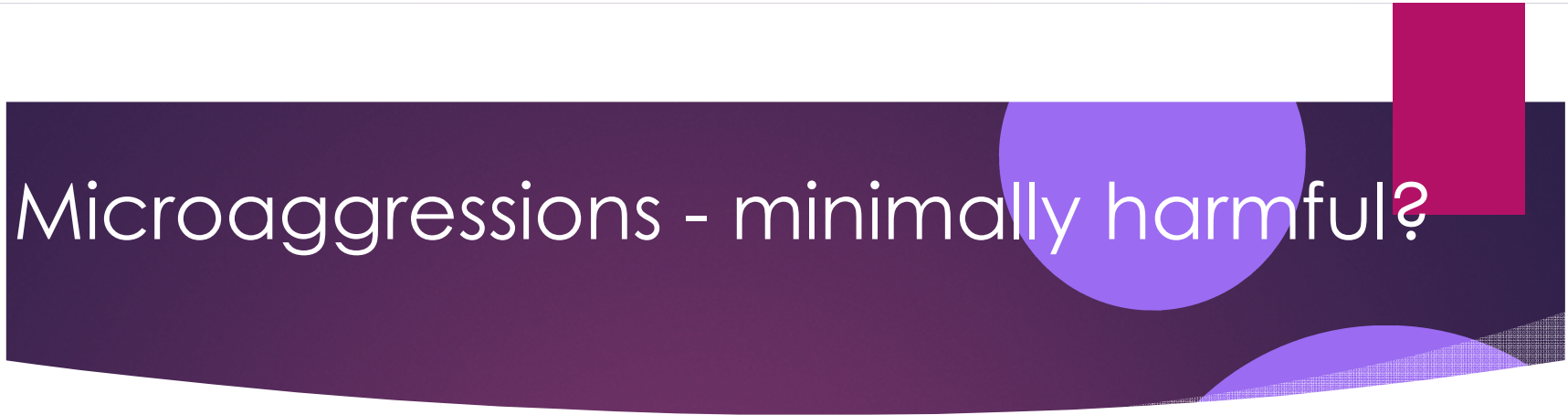
Environmental Microaggressions

► https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_hx30zOi9I

Microaggression Invisibility



- ▶ Remember, microaggressions reflect *unintentional* bias and can be hard to identify (and insidious).
- ▶ Microaggressions can be particularly difficult for people of privileged groups to identify, due to blind spots.
- ▶ Those not affected may consider them minor and encourage those affected to not waste time or effort on addressing them.
- ▶ **The most accurate assessment of a microaggression is from those disempowered rather than from those that enjoy the privilege of position or power.**



Microaggressions - minimally harmful?

- ▶ “Death by a thousand nicks...” (Sue)
- ▶ The cumulative effects of microaggressions contribute to self-doubt, frustration, and isolation
- ▶ Feeling invisible, defensive, “spokesperson” pressure, exhausted
- ▶ Experiences omitted, distorted, stereotyped

Effects of Microaggressions

- ▶ Psychological Impact (Blume et al., 2012; Nadal et al., 2014; Sue, 2010)
 - ▶ Anxiety
 - ▶ Paranoia
 - ▶ Depression
 - ▶ Sleep Difficulties
 - ▶ Lack of Confidence
 - ▶ Worthlessness
 - ▶ Intrusive Cognitions
 - ▶ Helplessness
 - ▶ Loss of Drive
 - ▶ Stress
 - ▶ Decreased sense of well-being



Effects of MicroAggressions

“Studies have shown that unlike blatant old-fashioned racism, **contemporary subtle forms of prejudice and discrimination (microaggressions) can impede cognitive function and performance**”

(Banji, Greenwald, 1994)



Microaggressions and Ethics

- ▶ **Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence:** Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm.
- ▶ **Principle D: Justice**
Psychologists exercise reasonable judgment and take precautions to ensure that their potential biases, the boundaries of their competence and the limitations of their expertise do not lead to or condone unjust practices.
- ▶ **Standard 2: Competence: Boundaries of Competence:**
...an understanding of factors associated with age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language or socioeconomic status is essential for effective implementation of services... psychologists have or obtain the training, experience, consultation or supervision necessary to ensure the competence of their services...

Microaggressions in and out of therapy



What Can be Done About Microaggressions?

1. **Build Competence!:** Establish expertise, learn
2. **Know Thyself!:** Understand your identity, biases, defensiveness
3. **See it!** Goal: “To make the invisible, visible” Know when a microaggression has occurred.
4. **Address it!:** Acknowledge it, talk about it, and “repair the tear.”





Step 1: Build Competence

1. Acquire knowledge about diverse groups/clients.
2. Provide culturally- and population-relevant services.
3. Develop culturally-relevant services through collaboration with different populations.
4. Learn ways to interact with/shape organizational structures, policies, practices, and regulations within institutions.

Step 1: Build Competence – Next Steps

1. **Acquire knowledge about diverse groups/clients and provide culturally- and population-relevant services.**

1. Book: Culturally Alert Counseling: A Comprehensive Introduction (Garrett McAuliffe)

2. **View client as expert.**

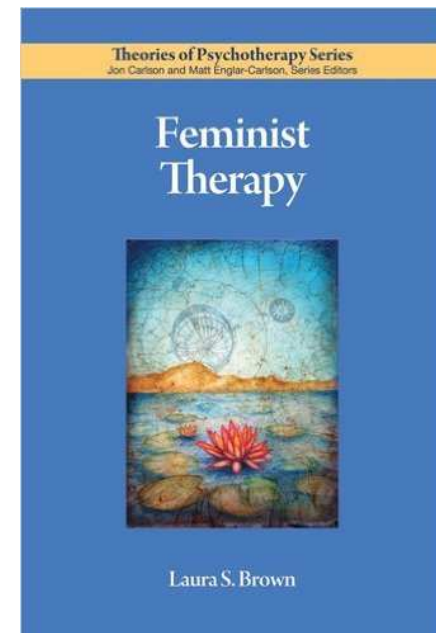
1. Consider feminist therapy approach
2. Book: Feminist Therapy (Laura S. Brown)

3. **Develop culturally-relevant services.**

1. Ask clients what works; hold focus groups
2. Consult with diverse professionals

4. **Learn ways to shape organizational structures, policies, practices, and regulations within institutions.**

1. Ontario Human Rights Commission: Workplace policies, practices and decision-making processes and systemic discrimination: <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-and-guidelines-racism-and-racial-discrimination/appendix-%E2%80%93-workplace-policies-practices-and-decision-making-processes-and-systemic-discrimination>





Step 2: Know Thyself

1. Get to know your own identity.
2. Acknowledge biases, address shame and defensiveness.
3. Explore the context of power in the therapeutic relationship.



Step 2: Know Thyself – Next Steps

Get to know your own identity.

1. Know what privileged status you have, and how this can impact therapy.
2. Know what marginalized status you have, and how this can impact therapy.
3. Be aware of hidden identities as well, in yourself and others.

► *Privilege – unseen and unheard... “An invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to be remain oblivious.” - Peggy McIntosh (Feminist and Ant-Racism Activist). A ‘cultural tunnel vision/privileged perspective’ limits—if not impairs-----the counselor’s ability to provide ethically appropriate treatment services for non--similar, vulnerable clients.*

► Heterosexual privilege and white privilege handouts online.

► Kathleen Ebbitt: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/why-its-important-to-think-about-privilege-and-why/>



RESPECTFUL Model

- ▶ R: Religion/spirituality
- ▶ E: Ethnic/racial background
- ▶ S: Sexual identity
- ▶ P: Psychological maturity
- ▶ E: Economic class background
- ▶ C: Chronological/developmental challenges
- ▶ T: Threats to one's personal well-being
- ▶ F: Family history and dynamics
- ▶ U: Unique physical characteristics
- ▶ L: Location of residence

<http://www.coedu.usf.edu/zalaquett/nimc/nimc2/rnl.htm>



Step 2: Know Thyself – Next Steps

Acknowledge biases, address shame and defensiveness.

1. Identify your blind spots and biases.
(http://www.diversityinclusioncenter.com/downloads/360_Assessment_Instrument.pdf - Diversity Leadership 360)
2. Defensiveness prevents self-awareness and growth and needs to be managed:
 1. Address shame: Brenebrown.com
 2. VIDEO: *Making Whiteness Visible*: <http://world-trust.org/shop/films/mirrors-privilege-making-whiteness-visible> “Featuring stories from white men and women on overcoming issues of unconscious bias and entitlement.”
 3. Deconstructing Privilege: Teaching and Learning as Allies in the Classroom (Ch. 2: Addressing Inequality and Injustice without Shame or Blame)

Reactions to Privilege







Step 2: Know Thyself – Next Steps

Explore the context of power in the therapeutic relationship

1. Know your power in the therapeutic relationship. (Expert? Educated?). Acknowledge the inherent power differential in psychotherapy. Where am I located in the power structures of my culture and community? Where is my client located?
2. How could the use of power affect my decision?
3. How could a power differential between myself and my client affect the welfare of my client?
4. How can we share lenses to come to an ethical and just decision?
5. Those in positions of power are less attuned to those who have less power. Subordinates are more attuned to those with more power. Remember: Power and Privilege BLIND!
6. Goodwin, S. A., Operario, D., & Fiske, S. T. (2010). Situational power and interpersonal dominance facilitate bias and inequality. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 4.



Step 3: Identify when microaggression has occurred.

- ▶ If the client seems to react negatively, that's a clue.
- ▶ Collect outcome data, session satisfaction data with clients, at least new ones.
- ▶ If the same statement/question seems odd when applied to a dominant or non-marginalized group, that's a clue.



Microaggression?

"Don't get me wrong, I'm absolutely fine with dads who work. It boosts their self-esteem and gives them an identity beyond just 'dad.'"



Step 3: Identify when microaggression has occurred, cont'd

How do we know?? ASK.

- ▶ When we are fearful about addressing the meaning of tension-filled interactions, offenses will be invisible (Goodman, 1995).
- ▶ Avoidance of sensitive topics (about race, etc.) is “a conspiracy of silence” (Sue). To combat microaggressions we must make the *invisible* visible. Otherwise, we let unintentional racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. continue.



Step 4: Address it (Including “Repair the Tear”)

- ▶ Rehearse responses using the “Five Secrets of Effective Communication” (David Burns):
 - ▶ Paraphrase the patient’s words (Thought Empathy),
 - ▶ Acknowledge his or her feelings (Feeling Empathy),
 - ▶ Find the truth in what the patient is saying (Disarming Technique),
 - ▶ Gently probe for more information (Inquiry),
 - ▶ Express warmth and compassion (Stroking), and
 - ▶ Share your reaction (“I Feel” Statements), in an honest and genuine manner
- ▶ Book: Feeling Good Together: The Secret to Making Troubled Relationships Work (Burns, 2010)
- ▶ Share how you can make it different and ask for future feedback
- ▶ Follow up



Step 4: Address it (Including “Repair the Tear”)

- ▶ Forgive yourself and understand the root of your defensiveness
- ▶ Understand intention does not equal impact
- ▶ “The simple act of naming a bias as such or objecting to it on the spot establishes a social atmosphere that discourages it: saying nothing serves to condone it.” – Daniel Goleman
Emotional Intelligence
- ▶ Successful resolution of ruptures can create an “emotionally corrective experience” (Safran & Muran, 2000)



Outside the Therapy Room: What can we do to increase visibility?

- ▶ Consult with, confide in trustworthy colleagues
- ▶ Prioritize ongoing personal and professional development
- ▶ Practice self-awareness and vigilance re: biases, power, privilege
- ▶ Remember CBT – challenge your own biases, practice disarming and communication techniques
- ▶ Engage in experiential reality: interact with people who are different from you
- ▶ Check out Dr. Allison Briscoe-Smith's website:
<http://www.drbriscoesmith.com/>



Outside the Therapy Room: What can we do?

- ▶ Be an advocate and an ally – Speak up when you see a microaggression occurring, change policies when possible
- ▶ Build your EQ:
 - ▶ Self-Awareness: Understanding identity, privilege, power
 - ▶ Affect regulation: Managing shame, guilt, defensiveness
 - ▶ Interpersonal Sensitivity/Awareness: reading others' reactions
 - ▶ Relationship management: metacommunication, repairing ruptures, effectively discussing difficult topics
- ▶ **Emotional Intelligence 2.0** Hardcover – June 16, 2009 by Travis Bradberry (Author), Jean Greaves (Author)