



Building Professional Excellence – Part 5

Session 1: Microaggressions From the Couch: Wellness Strategies for Counselors of Color Providing Cross-Cultural Care

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Dr. Susan Branco

Question from Daniel Burrell

Does Microaggression differ from transference?

Answer from Presenter

In a counseling relationship, a microaggression can be part of a client's transference to the counselor.

Question from Daniel Burrell

Would you expect to see microaggressive comments more toward the beginning of a counseling relationship versus later once some sort of rapport has been established?

Answer from Presenter

The participants in our study noted that these comments happened in the beginning of the counseling relationship. While we do not have evidence, beyond anecdotal, of microaggressions occurring in the middle and end of a counseling relationship, it seems plausible that these actions can occur at anytime.

Question from Allen Vosburg

Micro-Aggression coming from family and friends of client is an additional issue of concern when treating a client. What have you done to address this issue as well?

Answer from Presenter

There was a participant in our study who described a client who requested a joint session with her partner but shared with the counselor (identified as African American) that her partner was racist against Black people. As the pilot study notes, this created a concern for the counselor of Color in regard to how beneficial a joint session would be. While not fully explored in our study, in this scenario a counselor could explore this with the client and further determine how this impacts the client's relationship with family members. Certainly the counselor would also broach how this impacts or could influence the client and counselor relationship.

Question from Shreya Vaishnav

How can we advocate for the implementation of training specific to addressing needs of counselors of color in counselor education programs? Future supervisors, colleagues, counselors, and faculty are trained in counselor education programs and if we are able to advocate the implementation of multicultural and social justice competencies in our training, a lot of supervisors would be more equipped to address the microaggressions experienced by their supervisees.



Answer from Presenter

Current practicing professional counselors and counselor educators can advocate for more inclusive instruction and supervision that takes into account the Multicultural Counseling and Social Justice Competencies (MCSCJ) to allow for exploration of varying statuses of both the counselor and client. The MCSCJ also provide a context to discuss privilege, power, and oppression within the counseling relationship as well. At an individual level, counselors in training could utilize the MCSCJ framework in course assignments and petition for their departments to disseminate the information broadly. At a systemic level, professional counselors and counselor educators can petition continuing education providers (like NBCC) to offer more events related to training and supervision specific needs of counselors with marginalized identities.

Question from Catherine Love

At what point should a clinician make the decision to change, transfer, or refer a client due to ongoing microaggressional issues?

Answer from Presenter

This is a challenging decision making process where the counselor must seek to avoid harming the client or violating the American Counseling Association's *Code of Ethics* (2014), specifically, code A.4.b Personal Values. However, a counselor can continuously engage in clinical supervision and consultation, utilize ethical decision-making models (with documentation), and broach the microaggressive pattern as part of the counseling relationship with the client. If this is a frequent occurrence it could indicate that the client is uncomfortable with the counselor and therefore, discussion about client transfer could be relevant and in the client's best interest. There is no hard and fast rule (like most things) to this dilemma.

Question from Loo Gen Seah-McCrea

If you think your supervisee experienced repeated acts of microaggression from a client, would you intervene as a supervisor?

Answer from Presenter

As I shared on the webinar, I have observed supervisees experience repeated acts of microaggressions and I have intervened by acknowledging my observations to the supervisee (hence limited the second guessing that can often be a part of the microaggressive experience), checking in on how they are managing and coping, exploring how the behavior influences their personal feelings about the clients, consider how the supervisee can address the behavior (or not), and strategize on how the counselor can continue to provide ethical services. This process is ongoing and welcomed.



Question from Lakesha Bowie

How can we advocate for more training on micro-aggression?

Answer from Presenter

Similar to question #4 counselors can petition for more department related instruction on this topic, including providing guest lectures on the topic, and can petition for more related content offered as continuing education opportunities.

Question from Cesilia Gonzalez

You mentioned the importance of considering the cultural development of the individual. As a person of color, it has been my experience supervising students of color that they are at the beginner's stage of cultural development and it has impacted the relationship with the client and the ability to have conversations about micro-aggressions. Do you have any suggestions on how to work/supervise students in that case?

Answer from Presenter

I would consider the supervisee's cultural development as in tandem to their developmental level as a counselor-in-training (CIT). In this instance, it could be helpful for the supervisor to share what they are observing in the counseling relationship and elicit the CIT's awareness of their own identity and its impact on the counseling relationship to allow for further exploration of this dynamic. Here again, the MCSJC provide a helpful and non-threatening entrance into the discussion of the observed dynamics in the counseling session.

Question from Doris Carroll

How can counselors address intersectionality microaggressive comments from their clients? How do we educate Counselors of Color about intersectionality as it impacts microaggressions?

Answer from Presenter

Some participants in the pilot study endorsed the need for frequent consultation with other counselors of Color to debrief and receive support after experiencing a microaggressive comments. In addition, counselors in our study carefully considered client worldviews and racial identity development to discern if and how to respond to microaggressive behavior within the context of the counseling relationship. It is helpful to encourage counselors of Color to examine their own racial identity development and consider their own experiences with racism and microaggressions in an effort to prepare themselves for potential microaggressions from their clients in the counseling session. Most importantly, this kind of preparation must be done in a nonjudgmental manner where concerns of the counselors of Color are not dismissed, demeaned, or downplayed.

Question from Nahawand Abu-Isa

How can we participate in future research for counselor micro aggression?



Answer from Presenter

I hope to continue this line of research inquiry and will be posting calls for participants on the Counselor Education and Supervision List serve (CESNET) and hopefully through NBCC. I strongly encourage others to also develop research related to this very important and clearly needed topic.

Comment from Marjorie Hendrickson

I noticed that the age range in your pilot study was not large. A counselor may be older and experience microaggressions due to age.

Answer from Presenter

Yes, microaggressions can take many forms and can impact a broad array of statuses including age.

Comment from Anisa Diab

As a Muslim Counselor I have had clients refuse to work with me because of my faith. The response from my supervisor during my training was--no problem, we'll just put you with another counselor. If this was the other way around, it would never be accepted.

Answer from Presenter

I empathize with this scenario and it was painful to read. You are correct – clients may request a transfer but we may not refer outright. I am hopeful that your supervisor consulted with you about the client's request to at minimum, validate that this was a discriminatory act on behalf of the client, and work with you on how to manage these situations in the future. Ideally, the supervisor could also share their personal feelings about the event and seek your opinion on how this could have been handled differently.

Comment from Nahawand Abu-Isa

I believe that a counselor of color always has to take the extra miles to become successful in this kind of business, not because she isn't as competent (or even more competent) it is only because she/ he is a minority. And if you happen to have even a slight accent!!! Good luck convincing a caller "that you are competent". Very frustrating.

Answer from Presenter

I agree to all the points you brought up in your comment. It is very frustrating and more so when counselors do not have sufficient training or supervision to aid in responding to such encounters.

Comment from Nahawand Abu-Isa

I had a client who refused to set down after seeing me for the first time, her husband (a doctor) convinced her to stay but she had a very negativistic attitude the entire session, worked very hard on staying calm the entire session. However, I can count hundreds and hundreds of successful sessions with white clients who continued to see me for a long time.



Answer from Presenter

I appreciate your comment. Professional counseling is challenging yet highly rewarding work. Your example reinforces that strong counseling relationships can successfully incorporate varying racial, ethnic, and cultural identities.

Comment from Nahawand Abu-Isa

It's also very difficult to convince supervisees (future Counselors) to be supervised by you, just because you are a minority. This needs to be addressed during schooling.

Answer from Presenter

This is also a very important line of inquiry in need of further study.

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