



Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 2 Preparing Counselors of Color: Addressing Differences in Counselor Education and Supervision Practice

Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Dr. Kyla Kurian

Question from Ida Duplechin

What about "colorism"? I have cousins who experience that all the time.

Answer from Presenter

Sure, colorism, the preference of lighter skin or more white looking skin, can also be a divider of peoples. For many people of color it is preferred to be lighter in complexion. So a person with lighter complexion may have misconceptions or stereotypes about a darker skinned person. Also the reverse is true. The addition of colorism to the discussion of people of color and cultural competence is good. It hits on yet another complexity to the need for a unique and somewhat different training from White counselors.

Question from Susan Branco

How can training for COC address managing/ responding to racism/Microaggressions from clients?

Answer from Presenter

I think that the answer to this question varies depending on the severity of the situation. In the case of a microaggression from a client, I would encourage the COC to process it with a colleague or supervisor. I would ask some important questions: is the microaggression or racist comment or action a part of the presenting issue that the client is bringing to the session. If the answer is yes, then I would again get consultation, but challenge the client in a way that would have them think about how it was impacting his/her presenting issue. The focus should not be on the counselor, but the client especially if the microaggressions are not directed at the COC. This is not an easy cookie-cutter answer, I think that it is important to really assess how the racism and microaggressions are affecting the COC. I do not believe that COC should be subject to racism or harassment.

If the comments are intentional and directed at the COC then I would refer. I had a student of color who was doing intensive in-home services for a White family. One day they came in her office to discuss a situation they were not pleased with and dropped a bunch of bananas on her desk. She believes the clients were intentionally trying to hurt her by "calling" her a monkey. Instead of reacting she stood up and went to a White colleague and referred them to her for assistance. I thought that took guts on her part. She did not, however, feel comfortable addressing the clients personally or sharing what happened to her White colleague. She felt that the colleague would not understand. In fact she waited till the end of the day while in her car to cry. I really wish that she had a professional colleague that she could share what happened to her.



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Question from Jason Manizza

Are there any games and/or activities that can help children begin to become more culturally sensitive/competent, as well as help parents help their youth develop said competencies as well?

Answer from Presenter

If parents have the goal of teaching their children about understanding difference, I think that is wonderful! The earlier parents start with teaching their children about different cultures the better. For my husband and I made some very conscious decisions that we would use positive language when referring to other racial and ethnic groups. We talk about our “heritage” and the contributions of African Americans, Native Americans and Asian Indians. The shows my son watches are diverse. A friend of ours asked us if our 6 year old son watched a cartoon featuring a popular character who builds. We told him no because the show had no diversity—all the characters were White. Our son watches shows that have people from varied and ethnic backgrounds. His books are diverse as well as they include historical events and people that have made great contributions. For example, we are reading a book about Harriet Tubman and the underground railroad. We use this opportunity to talk about slavery and how all people should be valued. So, exposure, transparency and discussion about various cultures and the contributions made are key.

Question from Susan Branco

Are there any programs to teach current counselor instructors to be more culturally sensitive in there interaction with students of color?

Answer from Presenter

Actually, I am unaware of any programs which address this topic. First of all the trainers/educators themselves must be trained/educated about some of the issues mentioned in the webinar (example, negative mental health outcomes). Trainers need to really examine their own racial or ethnic identity and how comfortable they are in talking about discrimination, microaggressions, etc. Depending on the racial make-up of the trainer/educator and the COC, various precautions need to be taken. If the counselor educator is White and educating a COC who may be Immersed in his/her racial identity for example, the counselor educator may need to talk with the COC one-on-one. I think that doing a lot of listening and becoming more aware are keys to becoming more culturally sensitive. It is really important that the counselor educator does not blame or become defensive.

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