

Recognizing and Addressing Microaggressions in Treatment Groups:

An Integrated Approach

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Disclosure Information

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☀ No Disclosures



Learning Objectives

- ☀ Describe three aspects of the multicultural orientation framework.
- ☀ Identify the various types of microaggressions, broaching styles and dimensions, and microintervention strategies.
- ☀ Apply the new integrated approach to a client scenario.

Impact on Counseling

- ☀ *Microaggressions* are subtle, often unintentional, statements that reflect prejudiced or discriminatory messages about various marginalized groups (Sue et al., 2007).
- ☀ When seeking treatment, prior research suggests that counseling outcomes may be adversely affected by discrimination and microaggressions experienced during the counseling process (Constantine, 2007; Davis et al., 2016; Hook et al., 2016; Lyons et al., 2015; Oberheim et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2011, 2014; Smith et al., 2012).

Impact on Counseling

In counseling, microaggressions have been found to have a negative impact on:

- ☀️ perceived counselor competence (Constantine, 2007),
- ☀️ psychological well-being (Owen et al., 2011, 2014),
- ☀️ the working alliance (Constantine, 2007; Morton, 2011),
- ☀️ satisfaction with counseling (Constantine, 2007)
- ☀️ future help-seeking (Crawford, 2011).

Microaggressions and Group Therapy

☀️ The few studies that have examined microaggressions and group counseling outcomes suggest microaggressions may minimize the benefits of group counseling (Belcher Platt, 2018; Kivlighan et al., 2021).

Microaggressions

- ☀ Brief and everyday
- ☀ verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities,
- ☀ whether intentional or unintentional,
- ☀ that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative
- ☀ slights and insults to the target person or group.

Perpetrators are usually unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient of the communication.

What's an example of an environmental microaggression?

Three Types of Microaggressions

- ☀ **Microassaults** are conscious and deliberate acts meant to cause harm, intimidate, threaten, and make the person feel unwanted and unsafe
 - ☀ e.g., using a derogatory epithet or laughing at or telling a joke about women.

Three Types of Microaggressions

- ☀ **Microinsults** are subtle snubs, and the perpetrator is often not aware of the insult
 - ☀ e.g., a female doctor is mistaken for a nurse or saying to an Asian person “Why are you so quiet? Speak up more.”

Three Types of Microaggressions

★ **Microinvalidations** deny the reality of a person by negating the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of someone

★ e.g., asking a person of color, “Where are you from?”

Integrated Approach

- ✱ Our proposed approach draws from the following frameworks:
 - ✱ multicultural orientation (Davis et al., 2016),
 - ✱ broaching (Day-Vines et al., 2020)
 - ✱ antibias microintervention (Sue et al., 2019, 2021)

Multicultural Orientation

☀ ***Multicultural orientation consists of three primary constructs:***

☀ (1) cultural humility, (2) cultural comfort, and (3) cultural opportunities (Owen et al., 2011).

☀ ***Cultural Humility***

☀ A way of being that seeks to understand how culture influences the worldviews of both the counselor and the client, as well as dynamics within the counseling relationship.

☀ Recognition of one's personal values and biases, as well as the ability to manage instances of emotional defensiveness that arise when personal values and biases are elicited or challenged.

Multicultural Orientation

☀ *Cultural Comfort*

- ☀ level of comfort one has while discussing issues related to diversity, power, and oppression during counseling (Owen et al., 2011).

☀ *For group facilitators,*

- ☀ this includes openly acknowledging microaggressions and other cultural events that occur during the group and
- ☀ helping group members process these events in ways that allow individuals who have been transgressed to be heard and validated (Kivlighan & Chapman, 2018).

Multicultural Orientation

☀ *Cultural Opportunities*

☀ the extent to which a provider takes the opportunity to explore topics related to culture and identity (Owen et al., 2011).

☀ **In group counseling, these opportunities may be one of the more significant aspects of multicultural orientation,**

☀ as therapy groups inherently reflect and replicate systems of power, privilege, and inequity that operate within society (Kivlighan & Chapman, 2018).

Multicultural Orientation

- ✶ Research findings support multicultural orientation and its impact on therapeutic outcomes.

Broaching

- ☀ Coined by Day-Vines et al. (2007) to define the process by which a counselor makes deliberate efforts to talk about racial, ethnic, and cultural (REC) concerns that may impact clients and their presenting issues (Day-Vines et al., 2020).
- ☀ Within the broaching framework, counselors are encouraged to initiate discussions on REC concerns rather than simply respond to them.

Broaching

- ☀️ Counselors who initiate these talks recognize that: (a) their role carries distinct power in the therapeutic relationship and (b) society is racially charged and topics of REC are mostly considered taboo.
- ☀️ Due to these realities, clients may not directly attend to REC aspects unless invited to by the therapist; thus, deliberate broaching is necessary (Day-Vines et al., 2018)

Broaching

- ★ What do you think research has found related to broaching and therapy? What does it increase?
- ★ Broaching behaviors have been found to increase:
 - (a) counselor credibility;
 - (b) client satisfaction;
 - (c) the extent of client disclosure; and
 - (d) the likelihood of returning for subsequent counseling sessions (Day-Vines et al., 2007, 2020)

Five Broaching Styles

- ☀ There are five broaching styles which lie on a continuum and tend to align with the racial identity status (Helms, 2019) of the counselor (Day-Vines et al., 2007).
- ☀ **(1) Avoidant** - a counselor that views broaching as unnecessary and refuses to do so.
 - ☀ A counselor in training with an avoidant broaching style, for example, may be naïve, resistant, or defensive when asked to broach by a supervisor and demonstrate no consideration of REC dimensions without the direction of the supervisor.

Five Broaching Styles

- ☀️ **(2) Isolating** - REC dimensions are broached, but in a simple and superficial manner. Statements made from this broaching style may be expressed from obligation and tend to be disconnected from other aspects of the client's lived experiences.
- ☀️ **(3) Continuing/incongruent** - an anxious desire to consider cultural factors; however, the counselor with this style has limited skill to fully explore these issues and broaches REC aspects mechanically.

Five Broaching Styles

- ★ (4) **Integrated/congruent** - effective at broaching REC dimensions and do not see this is a technique, but a routine practice. They view broaching as a necessity in the counseling process and identify culturally appropriate interventions.
- ★ (5) **Infusing** - when a counselor (a) considers broaching integral to counseling, (b) acknowledges the impact of REC aspects on presenting problems, and (c) commits to social justice, equity, and inclusion as a change agent that moves beyond their professional work (Day-Vines et al., 2007).

Racial Identity and Broaching

RACIAL IDENTITY STATUS	DESCRIPTION OF RACIAL IDENTITY	BROACHING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS
Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oblivious to own racial identity• Uncritical acceptance of racism or color-blind perspective about race	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoiding broaching style• Refusal to broach• Broaching regarded as unnecessary• Refuses to consider contextual dimensions of race, ethnicity, and culture

Handout: See front page

Broaching Example

☀ Example

– “I think it’s important to explore racial, ethnic, and cultural identities in the context of therapy. So, for example, you and I are similar in that we are both women, but we are also not alike in that we are of different races and ages. I believe it’s important to acknowledge culture and how our experiences within a culture can impact our worldview and our comfort with counselors, doctors, and other helping professionals. These differences, as well as similarities, could potentially impact communication and the therapeutic process. If I may ask, what do you think about working with me? I am a white woman, who is a bit older than you?”

Four REC Dimensions

☀ Intracounseling

☀ Intraindividual

☀ Intra-REC

☀ Inter-REC

1. Intracounseling Dimension

- ☀ Refers to REC dynamics in the counselor–client relationship.
- ☀ Focus on identifying differences between the counselor and client to minimize the potential for these differences to interfere with therapy.
- ☀ This behavior:
 - ☀ demonstrates cultural humility,
 - ☀ reduces the power imbalance, and
 - ☀ provides a safe space for clients to talk openly about topics that are often considered taboo.

1. Intracounseling Dimension (Cont'd)

- ☀ Discuss privileged and marginalized identities and how they may influence their perspectives and counseling relationship.
- ☀ Cultural immediacy is particularly relevant in this dimension, as addressing these considerations in the present moment is a way to be authentic and build trust in the working alliance (Day-Vines et al., 2020, p. 110).

2. Intraindividual Dimension

- ★ REC factors are broached in therapy to explore the client's intersecting identities (e.g., race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, religion),
- ★ as well past and present experiences of oppression and
- ★ how these experiences influence their worldview and presenting concerns.

3. Intra-REC Dimension

- ✦ Exploration of issues within the intra-REC dimension consists of addressing issues that may be experienced between clients and others of the same REC group,
- ✦ as clients may have REC values, behaviors, and beliefs that vary from others with the same identity.

4. Inter-REC Dimension

- ☀️ The Inter-REC dimension may be explored by a counselor by acknowledging the role of racism, discrimination, and oppression in the lives of clients.
- ☀️ Counselors working within this dimension assist clients in generating strategies to combat these forces psychologically and through advocacy.
- ☀️ They also engage in advocacy interventions on behalf of the client (Day-Vines et al., 2020).

Antibias Strategies

- ★ **Microinterventions** are antibias actions used to counteract, challenge, diminish, or neutralize the expressions of prejudice, bigotry, and discrimination (Sue et al., 2021).
- ★ Microinterventions may be implemented by targets, bystanders, or allies (Sue et al., 2019, 2021).

Microinterventions

According to Sue et al. (2019), there are four objectives in these responses:

- ☀ (1) make the “invisible” visible,
- ☀ (2) disarm the microaggression,
- ☀ (3) educate the offender about the messages they send, and
- ☀ (4) include external support when needed.

Types of Microinterventions

1. Microaffirmations
2. Microprotections
3. Microchallenges.

Handout: See Figure 1

Microaffirmation

- ★ **Microaffirmations** can be verbal or nonverbal acts that validate a person's humanity, identity, reality, and worth.
 - ★ They can include communications such as compliments, validations, and statements of support.
- ★ An example of a nonverbal microaffirmation:
 - ★ When a sexist comment is made, and someone rolls their eyes or displays a facial expression that indicates irritation, disgust, or surprise.

Microprotection

- ☀ **Microprotections** tend to be from parents or other individuals who teach children and youth about oppression and discrimination.
- ☀ They engage in actions that promote ethnic/ cultural pride as well as assist them in acquiring coping skills and tools to deal with their experiences as a person from a marginalized group.

Microchallenges

- ☀ **Microchallenges** are ways to directly disarm, end, neutralize, or deflect the microaggression.
 - ☀ e.g., directly point out discriminatory behavior that you witnessed.
- ☀ Other examples:
 - ☀ (a) interrupting someone telling a racist joke;
 - ☀ (b) disagreeing with an individual who is expressing a stereotype; or
 - ☀ (c) asking the perpetrator of the microaggression, “What did you mean by saying [insert biased statement]?”
- ☀ Simply saying, “Ouch!” after an offensive statement can also be effective.

Other Examples

- ☀️ “When I heard your comment, I think/feel...”
- ☀️ “I think I heard you say...what did you mean by that?”
- ☀️ “I want to make sure I understand what you are saying, were you saying that...”
- ☀️ “In my experience,....”
- ☀️ “What you just said is not in alignment (or is inconsistent) with our agency’s values that prioritize group safety, doing no harm,...”
- ☀️ “You know, in this group, we work hard to create a safe space that is welcoming for all patients...”

Secondary Microaggressions

- ✱ Negative reactions can come from the perpetrator of the behavior when a microintervention occurs.
 - ✱ called *secondary microaggressions*.
- ✱ Secondary microaggressions further invalidate or deny the target's experience of it, exacerbate the given situation, and inflict even more harm on the target.
 - ✱ The reactions can be verbal or nonverbal in nature.

Secondary Microaggressions

- ✱ For instance, after confronting someone about their microaggression, one may hear:
 - ✱ “I didn’t mean it like that!” or “You’re so sensitive/paranoid.”
- ✱ We must be able to recognize when secondary microaggressions occur
 - ✱ and respond accordingly as an ally.
- ✱ If we are a bystander and fail to recognize or intervene,
 - ✱ this is also a secondary microaggression.

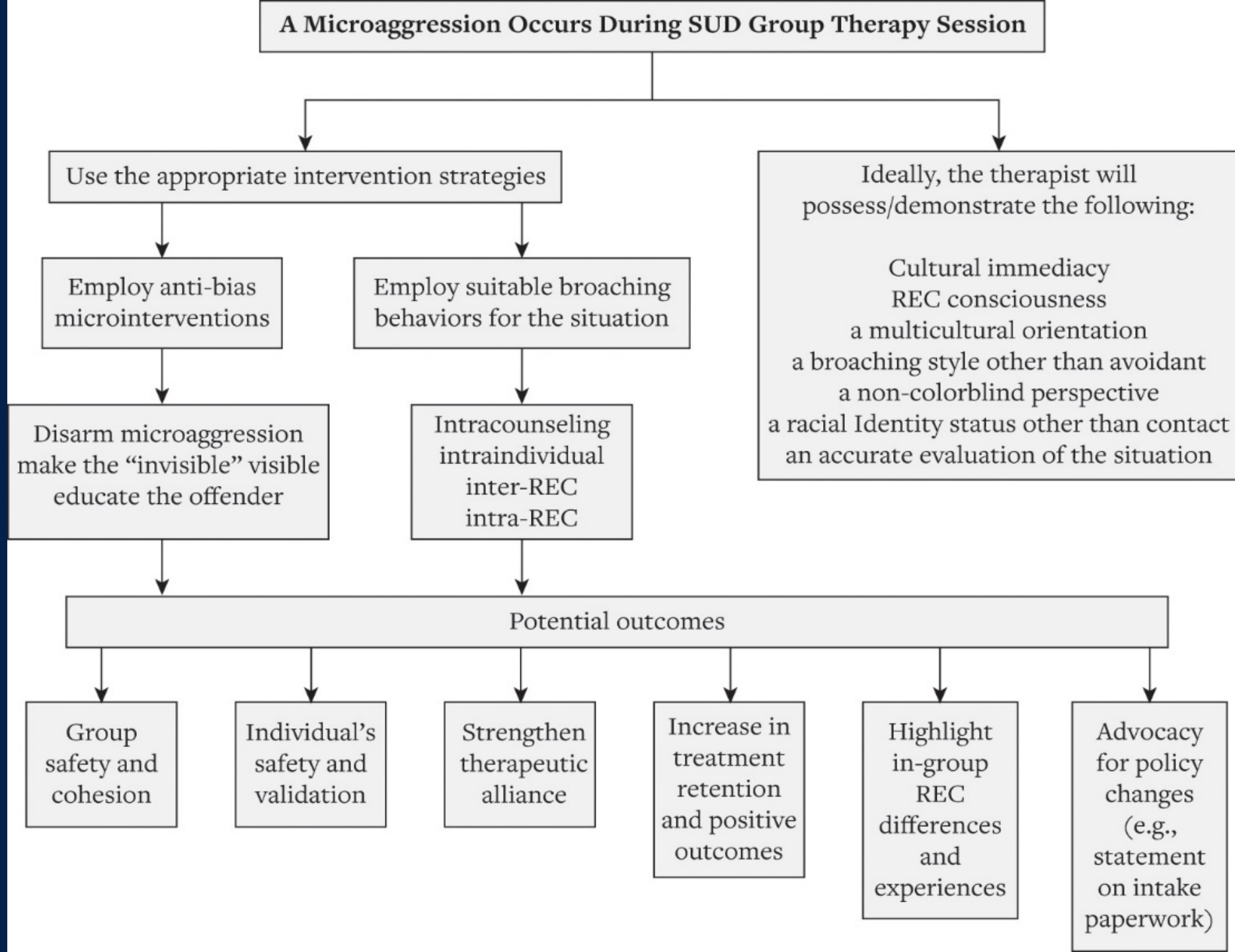
An Integrated Approach

☀ Ideally, you will see:

- ☀ an increase in group safety and cohesion,
- ☀ the target of the microaggression feel safe and validated,
- ☀ a stronger therapeutic alliance for all group members,
- ☀ a higher retention in SUD treatment.

☀ Other treatment outcomes may occur:

- ☀ mental health stability,
- ☀ sobriety, and
- ☀ increased engagement in therapy.



Considerations

- ☀ Context matters
- ☀ Individual characteristics and experiences
- ☀ Curriculum and time management

Final Takeaways/Summary

- ☀️ Microaggressions negatively impact the counseling experience for those that encounter them.
- ☀️ The integrated approach proposed here provides a conceptual framework that incorporates the work of various experts in the counseling field into one model.
- ☀️ Gain an increased understanding of the different types of microaggressions and be able to recognize them when they occur.
- ☀️ Employ antibias strategies that disarm the microaggression, make the invisible visible, educate the offender, and validate and support the person/group that was the target.

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INNOVATIONS IN PRACTICE

Recognizing and addressing microaggressions in addiction treatment groups: An integrated approach

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