

WORKSHOP 1: ADDRESSING THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: INCORPORATING ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY PRINCIPLES TO OVERCOME INTERGROUP ANXIETY AND IMPROVE RACE RELATIONS AMONG MENTAL HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

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(1) Microaggressions—covert acts of racism—are a common form of modern workplace discrimination and are particularly damaging to people of color because the perpetrator can easily deny racist intent by offering an alternate interpretation. Racism is known to be a form of psychological trauma and is associated with many mental illnesses including PTSD, depression, and schizophrenia. A workable conceptualization of microaggressions is therefore warranted for mental healthcare professionals committed to the reduction of racial disparities in treatment. Contextual behavioral science (CBS) emphasizes the role of engaging conflicting beliefs within an individual to promote behaviors that align more fully with that individual's professed values. CBS incorporates the hexaflex model of acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and provides a promising framework for improving race relations in the workplace. One construct that has emerged out of CBS is intergroup anxiety (IGA), a learned response that can occur between individuals of different ethnic/racial backgrounds. Microaggressions can therefore be seen as a demonstration of avoidance of IGA.

(2) This workshop aims to elicit IGA to better equip mental health practitioners in addressing issues of race known to emerge in the clinician-patient encounter.

(3) This workshop will consist of education on the concept of IGA, followed by three vignette-based scenarios that elicit IGA. The scenarios will be based on input from mental health clinicians at Zucker Hillside Hospital's Ambulatory Outpatient Adult Psychiatry Department Clinic in Queens, NY.

(4) The emotions elicited through the exercises will be processed through a CBS/ACT framework. At the end of this workshop, participants should feel more comfortable in addressing racist encounters among their patients and colleagues.

(5) After experiencing the firsthand benefits of exposure to IGA as opposed to avoidance, participants will likely feel encouraged to openly discuss the impacts of racism at their home institution and promote equitable mental health treatment.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Formulate microaggressions as manifestations of intergroup anxiety
2. Facilitate discussions around racism and ethnicity among colleagues without fear of judgment.

References

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