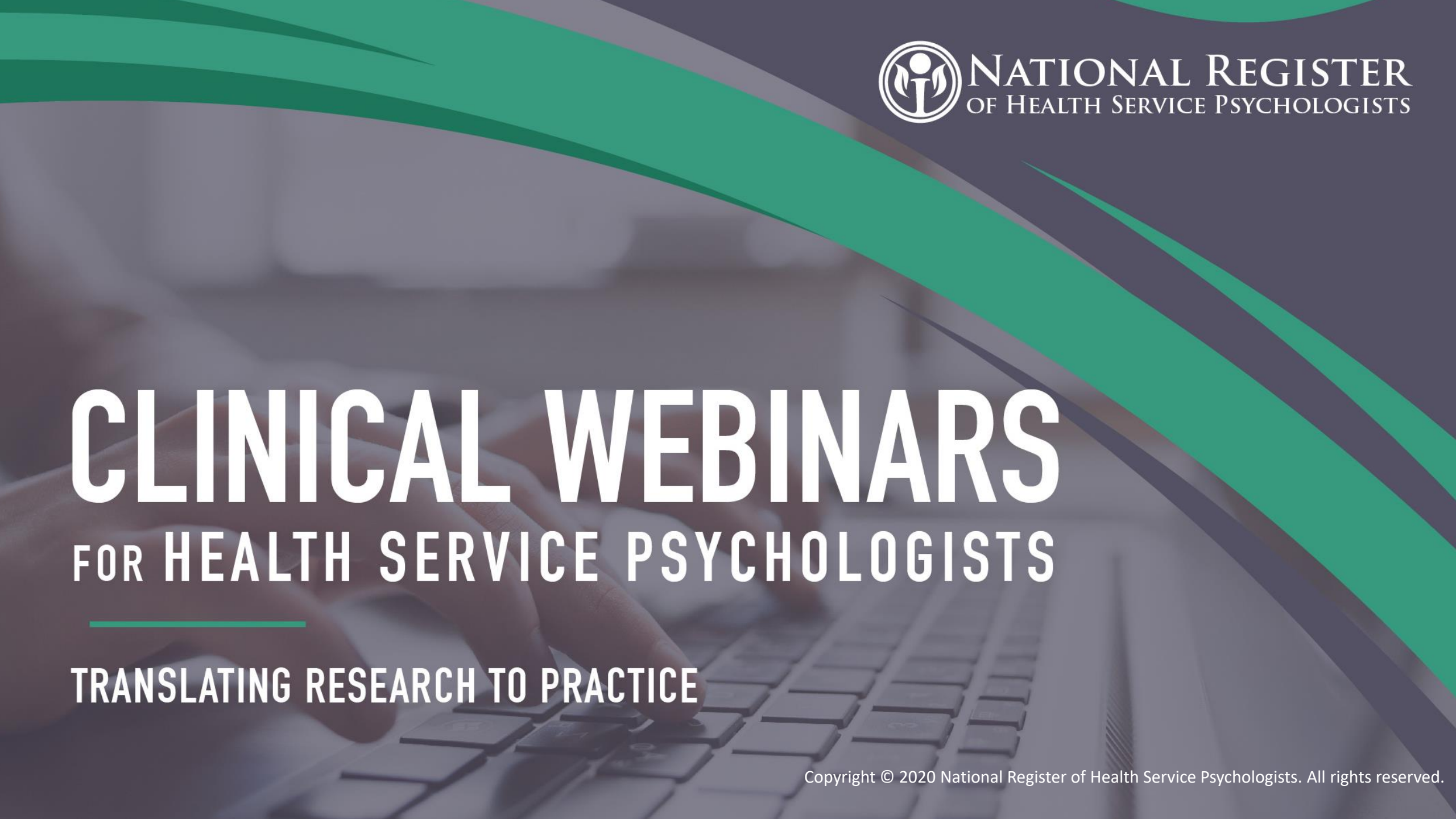

National Register of Health Service Psychologists

CLINICAL WEBINARS

FOR HEALTH SERVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS

TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

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Dr. Anahí Collado

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE WITH INDIVIDUALS FROM LATIN AMERICAN DESCENT

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Using Social Class and Classism Theory to Strengthen Our Understanding of Clients

William Ming Liu, Ph.D.

University of Maryland, College Park

Counseling, Higher Education, & Special Education

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William Ming Liu, Ph.D.

Professor of Counseling Psychology and Department Chair. For 15 years he was a licensed psychologist in Iowa and was President of the Board of Directors for the Shelter House, where he also started and supervised a psychology clinic serving those who experienced homelessness. He edited and wrote books on multicultural competencies, Asian American masculinities, and social class. He is co-author of the forthcoming books *The Psychology of Privilege, White Supremacy, and Power* (Oxford University Press) and *Social class as Worldview: A Critical Introduction (*Routledge). He is Editor for *Psychology of Men and Masculinities* and fellow of Divisions 17 and 51.

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Disclosures/Conflicts of Interest

None

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe the Social Class and Classism Theory
2. Explain the impact of the Upward Mobility Bias
3. Demonstrate how to use social class and classism experiences to enhance psychotherapy

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Summary of Today's Presentation

- Social class and classism represent core aspects of our identities, yet most psychologists struggle to integrate them into psychotherapy. Using social class and classism theories, the webinar will provide psychologists with clinical examples to understand client experiences. The webinar will also guide psychologists in understanding their own biases and how to work with clients from various social class groups.

My Clinical Work Around Social Class & Classism

- Psychology clinic
  - Sole provider for four years
- Practicum supervision
- Testing & Assessment
- Individual, group, family, and couples therapy
- Community consultations
- Permanent Housing Program with VAMC

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Personal Experiences of Classism

- Most powerful experience of classism
- How would you describe your social class
- How did you learn about your social class

Social Class Items & Questions

Indicate your income

Highest grade completed

Parental income

Household income

Parent(s) highest education completed

Occupation

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Why Social Class & Classism

- Much of what we know are from sociological constructs
- Objective indicators used to stratify people
  - Problems of income, education, and occupation
  - Assumes people think similarly in the same social class group
  - Does not consider geographic variability
  - Does not consider race
- Unnecessary confusion between social class and socioeconomic status
- Classism is not addressed

Social Class and Classism in Practice

- Sociological constructs are focused on measurement
  - Social Class is measured and factored out or held constant
  - Not addressed
  - Used parenthetically
- Most practitioners did not know how to understand social class
  - Translate social class into a psychological construct
- How does classism relate to social classes
  - What is the impact of classism in a person's life?
  - Trauma & Shame
    - Intersections of racism and classism become intergenerational traumas

Social Class Biases in Practice

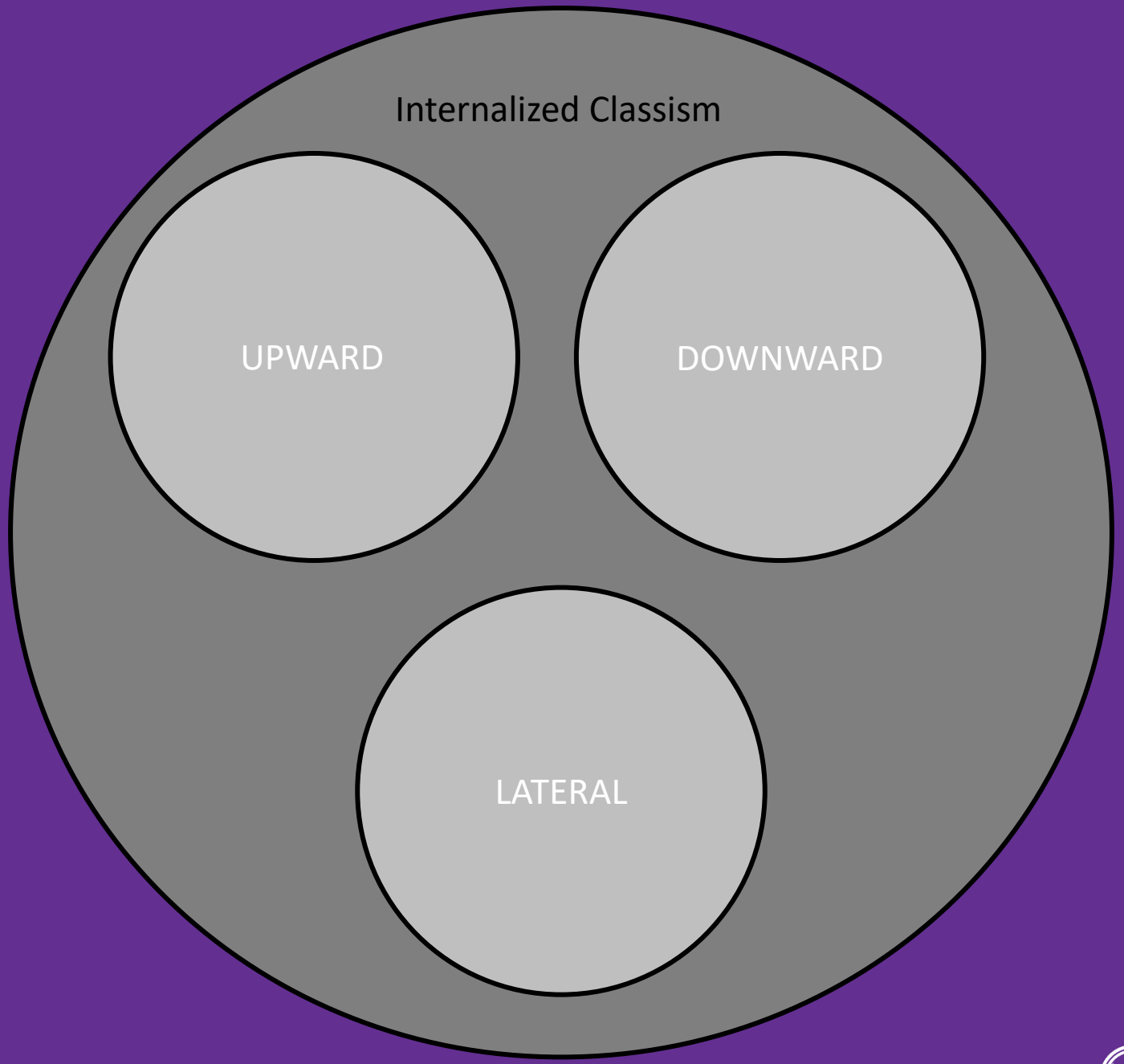
- Middle-class assumptions
  - How to communicate with a health care provider
  - Health history is accurate
  - Completing health forms and information
  - Communication style and preferences
  - Comfort in an office setting
  - We often are looking for cues and clues about social class

Clinical Example

- 27 year old Latinx woman (cis-het) earning her MBA
- Grieving the recent death of her mother
- Exploring the meaningfulness of her MBA
- Explored childhood memories

Classism

- You cannot have a social class without classism
- Functions to maintain perceived social class boundaries and groups
- Classism can be both experienced and practiced
  - Except for internalized classism
- Not all classisms are alike because of power, race, and gender
  - e.g., downward classism is often the most powerful



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Upward Classism

- Seeing those who are in a social class position above you as “out of touch,” “bougie,” and “elitists.”
- Demean the worldview and values of those perceived in higher positions
- See people in upper-social classes as “out of touch”
- May still aspire to them
- Practice: Figuring out how to “fit-in”

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Downward Classism

- What we tend to think of when we consider classism
- Those you regard below you are demeaned and held in contempt
- Think of them as lazy, poor behaviors & etiquette
- Feeling demeaned
  - Contempt
- Practice: Being aware of language that is patronizing, paternalizing, or idealizing

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Lateral Classism

- Keeping up with the neighbors, because they keep reminding you
- Feeling pressure to keep-up
- Pressuring others to fulfill their role within ”our” social class group
- Crabs-in-a-barrel
- Practice: The Treadmill

Internalized Classism

- Internal psychological distress related to failing to maintain one's social class standing and position
- Is the background for all the other forms of classism
- Many commercials elicit internalized classism
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Frustration
- Demoralization

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Clinician Biases

- Upward Mobility Bias
  - Adherence to meritocracy
  - People should seek upward mobility
  - Down-shifters
- Social Class and Classism is not about finances or accounting
  - Budgeting
  - Financial literacy
- Consumerism & Materialism
  - How do we respond to buying preferences, labels, brands

Practice Considerations

- Challenging our own cultural encapsulation
- How has a person made sense of their upbringing
- How social class played out in relationships
- Becoming more aware of shame and traumas related to classism
- Awareness of how social class functions around the person

Q&A

- Dr. Sammons will read select questions that were submitted via the Q&A feature throughout the presentation.
- Due to time constraints, we will not be able to address every question asked.

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