



NATIONAL REGISTER
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CLINICAL WEBINARS

FOR HEALTH SERVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS

TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Treating Racial Trauma With Culturally Informed Strength Based Interventions

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Dr. Handford is a licensed psychologist, published author, and consultant specializing in racial trauma and its impact on identity development. As a consultant, she provides tailored trainings, workshops, content development, and strategic planning to guide mental health spaces, schools, and companies in the integration of racial trauma supports and anti-racist organizational change.

Disclosures/Conflicts of Interest

I have no conflicts of interest to disclose

Learning Objectives

1. Identify the impact of racial trauma on identity development
2. Demonstrate the role of therapy in helping to heal identity ruptures caused by racial trauma
3. Discuss the value of integrating the Community Cultural Wealth Framework in racial trauma therapy

What is Racial Trauma?

- Frightening, dangerous, or upsetting **race-based** events or discrimination that can cause stress, death, or **threat to the physical or psychological integrity of self or others**
- Similar to the traditional conceptualization of PTSD, a single racially traumatic event can lead to PTSD. **However racial stress and trauma is also distinct because it is inclusive of the cumulative impact of racism in smaller doses (e.g. microaggressions).**

What Contributes to Racial Trauma?

Community

- Politics
- Community trauma
- Institutional racism
- Media

Family

- Generational trauma
- Colorism in families
- Internalized racism
- Racial socialization

Peers

- Harassment
- Gaslighting
- Social media
- Interpersonal racism

School & Work

- Color Blindness
- Microaggressions
- Racist policies and practices
- Racial battle fatigue
- Bias, power, and privilege

Racially Traumatic Events Impact Experiences Of...

- Depression
- Anger
- Intrusive Thoughts



- Avoidance
- Hypervigilance
- Physical Symptoms

Racial Trauma and The Clinician's Role

- Establish and be guided by a collaborative process
- Establish a space of psychological safety
- Help client navigate their distress in a way that keeps their sense of self and safety intact

Community Cultural Wealth Model

- A theory created by Dr. Yosso that “focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged (Yosso, 2005, p. 69)
- This theory conceptualizes cultural value and wealth using six cultural capitals:
 - Aspirational Capital
 - Linguistic Capital
 - Familial Capital
 - Social Capital
 - Navigational Capital
 - Resistance Capital

Aspirational Capital

Defined as “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.”
(Yosso, 2005, pp. 77 - 78)



Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Processing moments when your client had a goal and felt pride in the work they did to achieve it
- Unpacking how the client’s engagement in therapy is evidence that they can set goals and thrive in the pursuit of them
- Identifying pivotal moments in Black culture and history that reinforce the power, hope, and forward thinking Black individuals have demonstrated to advance and achieve on our own terms

Linguistic Capital

Defined as “the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style...may include memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial affect, vocal tone, volume, rhythm and rhyme.”

(Yosso, 2005, pp, 78-79)



Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Exploring the positive language your client or others have used to describe them
- Unpacking Black centered conversations or inside jokes that the client has recently experienced or witnessed that gave them joy
- Identifying Black centered media that the client enjoys and exploring the linguistic capital that lies within them

Familial Capital

Defined as “those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79)



Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Exploring the values your client has learned throughout their life from others that have positively impacted their Black identity
- Defining family on their terms, identifying those who they consider their chosen family, and processing the value of those relationships

Social Capital

Defined as “networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society’s institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79)



Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Helping your client identify the groups or communities that help them feel safe and sane and processing the value of those spaces
- Identifying organizations and resources that affirm Black identity and address Black mental health



Navigational Capital

Defined as “skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind.” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80)

Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Helping your client identify people, places, or resources that have helped them navigate work, school, or other prominent systems in their life
- Identifying community spaces, affinity groups, or professional networks that may help your client find mentorship as they navigate different systems

Resistance Capital

Defined as “knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality.” (Yosso, 2005, pp. 80-81)



Affirming strengths in this capital can look like:

- Processing with your client how they define, empower, and affirm their Black identity in the face of discrimination and injustice
- Finding pivotal moments in history of Black liberation and resistance to share with your client

Case Example

Dr. Joss is a licensed psychologist and the owner of a therapy practice. She has started working with Naomi, a 26 year old Black woman. When Naomi started therapy she reported wanting to find “strategies for dealing with racism and microaggressions because I have no one to talk to about it and I’m struggling.” Naomi reported that growing up her parents focused mostly on Black pride and didn’t talk much about racism or how to cope with it. She noted that she went to a predominantly Black elementary, middle, and high school and then attended a HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) for undergrad and as a result, attending a predominantly white institution for her doctoral degree has been a culture shock.

Case Example (Cont.)

According to Naomi, she is often the only or one of few Black individuals in most of her graduate settings. She reported experiencing incidents of classmates touching her hair without her consent, constantly being told how surprised faculty are “that she is so articulate”, being asked to speak for all Black people on topics in class, having her ideas not taken seriously in group projects, and being racially profiled in the book store. She reported that when she attempts to address these negative racial encounters, she is often told that she has misinterpreted a situation or asked why it bothers her so much. She reported that recently she has felt depressed, has a lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities, and cited a panic attack she had upon returning to campus after the holiday break. Naomi reported that she is starting to question if she can succeed in her desired profession as a Black woman.

Aspirational Capital

- Dr. Joss and Naomi process the dreams, goals, and desires she has for herself within her chosen profession and discuss how negative racial encounters don't get to define her professional identity
- They explore and tap back into the internal motivation and sense of self Naomi felt settled in before starting her doctoral program and discuss ways to ground herself and return to what she knows about the value she holds as a reminder that she deserves to pursue the career that has excited her all these years

Linguistic Capital

- Dr. Joss validates Naomi's discomfort with her communication style being noted and highlighted in ways that her white classmates don't have to experience and they process the racist nature of being surprised that Black people are articulate
- They identify resources that provide various representations of Black women with all types of speaking styles and they explore the value in the verbal and nonverbal communication styles that come naturally to Naomi

Familial Capital

- Dr. Joss and Naomi unpack how hard it is for her to navigate conflicting messages of Black pride from her parents and pre-doctoral academic experiences and the racism she is experiencing now
- Dr. Joss helps Naomi understand that she can lean into the Black centered values and support from her family as she navigates this new chapter. They discuss how her parents racial socialization strategy was their way of helping her navigate racism and that its okay for her to let them know that she now needs other strategies as well and seek their guidance

Navigational Capital

- Dr. Joss and Naomi process her school experiences thus far and the racial battle fatigue she is experiencing as she tries to figure out how to navigate negative racial encounters in her program without internalizing the racist views of her classmates and faculty
- Dr. Joss and Naomi work together to find Black associations relevant to her academic and professional focus so that she can benefit from tangible resources, representation, and mentorship from other Black women to validate her experiences and support her as she works to achieve her goal

Social Capital

- Dr. Joss and Naomi explore ways that Naomi can lean on her close friends for support when she is at school
- They work together to find Black centered spaces or organizations that align with Naomi's social interests so that she has enjoyable, safe, and affirming social outlets not just during holiday breaks but year round

Resistance Capital

- Dr. Joss and Naomi explore psycho-education related to racialized imposter phenomenon to dismantle and disempower the myth of intellectual inferiority that Black students face and process Naomi's success and positive feedback before and during her doc program to establish tangible evidence of her developing expertise and value in the field
- They work together to find resources related to the experiences of other Black women in academia so that Naomi feels less alone and is empowered with strategies to cope with negative racial encounters and increase her sense of agency

Takeaways

- You do not have to use every capital with your client
- Allow the cultural capitals that feel most salient to your client's needs provide a structure to help you guide their racial trauma healing and engage in process moments
- Find ways to affirm your client's identity and strengths while you help them navigate their distress
- Create a psychologically safe space for your client to process their experiences

Consulting & Support

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Q&A With Dr. Handford



- We will now discuss 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.

References

- Carter et al. (2013). Initial Development of the Race-Based Traumatic Stress Symptom Scale: Assessing the Emotional Impact of Racism. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 5(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025911>
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