Addressing Racial Stress and Trauma and Promoting Resilience for Youth of Color within the Therapeutic Setting

Farzana Saleem, PhD
UCLA Ford Foundation and Pritzker Center Postdoctoral Fellow

Learning Objectives

• Assess racial stress and trauma (RST) and how it impacts youth of color

• Apply new skills to discuss race and process RST with clients in the therapeutic context

• Utilize strategies to address RST and promote resilience for youth of color
Presentation Outline

- Definitions & research overview
- Assessing RST
- Addressing/treating RST
- Case Study

Conversations About Race and Racial Stress

- Kids talking about growing up Black
- Adults talking about growing up Latinx & talking to children about being Latinx
Group Discussion

How did you perceive the emotional and psychological state of the:
- African American boys who talked about their experiences?
- Latinx adults who talked about their experiences as children or talking to their children?

Group Discussion

Have any of your clients expressed stress or concern about any of these topics in therapy?
- Ethnicity-Race
- Racial discrimination or prejudice
- Racial stress or trauma
- Racial incidents that they witnessed or saw in the media
- Colorism
- Racial Identity Conflict
- Other race-related topics

Think about possible reasons why or why not....
Key Definitions

- **Racial Discrimination**: Any act of an individual or institution that denies equitable treatment to an individual or group because of phenotypic or [racial] group affiliation (Yetman, 1985).

- **Racial Macroaggressions**: Small slight(s) or offense(s) that may be intentional but are mostly unintentional; they do not cause major harm to the target but the encounters can accumulate to be burdensome over time (Sue, 2007).

Racial Discrimination

- More than two-thirds of African American and Latinx youth between the ages of 10-19 report exposure to racial discrimination (Fisher et al., 2000)

- Research indicates that Latinx and African American youth report the high amounts of racial discrimination (Fisher et al., 2000)

- Some youth are able to identify their race as early as preschool (Katz, 1973), but perceptions are sharpened in early adolescence (Seaton et al., 2008)
Racial discrimination is associated with a host of negative consequences, such as:
- Stress (e.g., Clark et al., 1999)
- PTSD symptoms (e.g., Carter, 2007)
- Depression (e.g., Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007)
- Anger (e.g., Simons et al., 2006)
- Binge drinking/eating (Harrington et al., 2010)
- Decreased self-esteem (Wong et al., 2003)
Racial Stress and Trauma

- Race-based traumatic stress (RBTS) “Emotional injury caused by racially motivated stressors that overwhelm one’s coping capacity and impacts quality of life and/or cause fear, helplessness, & horror…” (Carter, 2007)

- Experiences of racial trauma may include (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Helms et al., 2010)
  - Humiliating and shaming events
  - Threats of harm and injury
  - Witnessing racial discrimination towards others people of color

Racial Stress and Trauma

- Racial incidents can be emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable and illicit trauma symptoms (Carlson, 1997)
  - Intrusion, avoidance, or arousal or irritability with psychological symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, low self-esteem)
  - Presentations may manifest through behavioral avoidance (e.g., refusing to return to where one was rejected) or
  - Physiological symptoms (e.g., increased complaints of stomach aches)
Williams et al., 2018

Developmental Ecological Model of Youth Racial Trauma (DEMYth-RT)
(Saleem, Anderson, & Williams, under review)

Epigenetic Vulnerability from Historical Trauma

Intervention

Racist Event(s)

Prevention

Developmental Age

Family Processes/Contexts

Individual Traumatic Reaction

Community Processes/Context

Symptomatology

Intervention

Reexperiencing Intrusion

Avoidance

Negative Mood & Cognitions

Psychological Arousal
What are some barriers that therapists can have in assessing and/or addressing racial stress and trauma?

Racial Stress and Trauma in Therapy

- Despite evidence that racial encounters can be stressful or traumatizing for individuals, RST is often misperceived or unacknowledged by clinicians
  - Lack of awareness
  - Bias
  - Concerned about “subjectivity”
  - Discomfort

- Oversight can lead to
  - Inappropriate treatment decisions / diagnosis
  - Impact rapport
  - Treatment outcomes
Multicultural Framework

- Being aware of one’s own cultural heritage and biases
- Being informed, sensitive, and respectful of others’ cultural heritage
  - Knowledge, understanding historical and current sociopolitical factors that affect communities of color
  - Skills, sending and receiving culturally adequate verbal and nonverbal messages

Assessment of Racial Trauma

- Who should we definitely assess?
  - Clients who identify incidents and/or those who are members of racial minority groups (Scurfield & Mackey, 2001)

- Steps to create an environment that is safe for therapists to assess and clients to disclose racial trauma (Bryant-Davis, 2006)
  - Therapeutic relationship focus
  - Therapeutic process focus
  - Trauma history focus, including race-based traumas
Assessment: Therapeutic Relationship

- Acknowledge in the first session that there are ways that the counselor and client are similar and different, such as gender, race, and age range.

- Communicate to the client that if he or she has any thoughts or concerns related to these similarities or differences, he/she can discuss them during session.

- Engage clients in dialogue about feelings and experiences of race that would otherwise not be discussed or would only be discussed after long-term therapy, which many cannot afford.

Assessment: Therapeutic Process

- Explain your approach to the therapeutic process, the time frame, and the goals of treatment.

- Inform the client that the therapeutic relationship is one in which it is safe to discuss issues that may often be felt unsafe to discuss, such as sexual orientation, race, and religion.
  - This indicates to the client that he or she is open to dialogues on race and racism.
Assessment: Trauma History

- When assessing trauma history, include race-based traumas and assess for the impact on functioning (e.g., intrusive thoughts, numbing, hyperarousal)

- Therapist should note that many people have had disturbing experiences as a result of other’s response to their background...
  - “I would also like to ask if you have ever been treated in a disturbing manner because of your race” OR “Have you ever had a bad or upsetting experience because of your race, skin color, facial features, hair texture, cultural, or religious background?” (Scurfield & Mackey, 2001; Wyatt, 1990).
  - Ask if the client has ever “witnessed someone else being treated in a disturbing manner due to any racial, ethnic, or cultural factors...”

Trauma History Follow Up

- To follow up the therapist should
  - Respond with belief and support
  - Determine the client’s relationship, if any, with the perpetrator or survivor of the incident
  - Inform the client that along with other goals and concerns, the incidents that he/she/they experienced are also issues that can be explored therapeutically
Suggestions for Assessing Racial Stress and Trauma

- Clinical interview, inquiring about racial stress and trauma
- UCLA
  - Add in question about racial incidents
- Racial Discrimination Measure
  - Uconn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Survey (UnRESTS) (Williams et al., 2018)
  - Index of Race-related stress for adolescents (Utsey, 1996)
  - Perceived racism scale (Nyborg, 2000)
Treatment of Racial Trauma

- Acknowledge
- Share
- Safety and self-care
- Grieving/mourning the losses
Treatment of Racial Trauma

- Shame and self-blame/internalized racism
- Anger
- Coping strategies
- Resistance strategies

Therapeutic tools to promote Resilience
Two factors that protect against the negative impact of racial stress on youth’s mental health are:

- Having a positive ethnic-racial identity
  - Feelings of pride, involvement, and belongingness with one’s racial-ethnic and cultural background

- Receiving ethnic-racial socialization
  - Instilling ethnic-racial pride
  - Preparing youth for racial discrimination

Ethnic-Racial Socialization (ERS)

Communications and interactions conveyed to youth about race and cultural heritage to prepare them for managing racial discrimination

- Many primary caregivers/parents report conveying verbal and non-verbal ERS messages to their children.

- Four of the most common verbal messages that parents convey are:
  - Cultural socialization
  - Preparation for bias
  - Promotion of mistrust
  - Egalitarian

(Hughes et al., 2006; Stevenson et al., 2002)
Ethnic-Racial Socialization (ERS)

There are mixed findings about the effects of individual ERS messages.

- **Cultural socialization is generally protective** (Brown & Tylka, 2011).
  - Symptoms of anxiety (Bannon, et al., 2009), Anger (Stevenson, 1997), Depressive symptoms (Neblett et al., 2008)

- **Egalitarian messages are not generally protective**
  - Exacerbate the impact of racial discrimination (e.g., Hughes et al., 2006)

- **There are mixed findings about the benefits of racial barrier messages in isolation** (Hughes et al., 2006).
  - Less perceived stress (Bynum et al., 2007) and delinquency engagement (Burt, et al., 2012)
  - No protective effects (Caughy et al., 2002)
  - Increased depressive symptoms (McHale et al., 2006) and anger (Stevenson et al., 1997)

Resources

- Provide psychoeducation to parents
  - APA RESilience Initiative - [toolkit](#)

- Utilize videos and books
  - Video tips for parents
  - Positive racial identity

- Connect families with organizations / programs
  - Embracerace Organization
  - EMBRace Program

- Use other resources!
  - APA guide on addressing the mental health needs of ethnic-minority youth
  - NCTSN resource addressing racial trauma at school
### Observational Measure of ERS

Afrocentric Home Environment Inventory; Caughy et al., 2002

Below are some items that are often found in African American households, please indicate, by circling **YES** or **NO**, which of these items can be found in your household.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Is this item in your household?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black pictures, posters or artwork</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black religious figures or other Black figurines</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least three African American books belonging to your teenager.</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least ten African American books not belonging to your teenager (AA History books, AA magazines, textbooks, novels?)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American music (e.g., gospel, R&amp;B, Rap, etc.)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials, other than book or music, that teach about African American History (e.g., board games, puzzles, videos, etc.)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures of African American family members or friends</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A frequent subscription (more than one copy) to at least one African American magazine (e.g., Essence, Ebony, Jet, etc.)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing or household items made of African/kente fabrics, prints, or materials</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Observational Measure of Racial Socialization- Therapy

Below are some items that are often found in Latinx households, please indicate, by circling **YES** or **NO**, which of these items can be found in your therapy room.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Is this item in your therapy room?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latinx posters or artwork</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx figurines or toys</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx books (History books, magazines, novels)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures or quotes from famous Latinx leaders or community members</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx music (e.g., Salsa, Bachata, Merengue)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials, other than books or music that teach about Latinx History (e.g., board games, puzzles, videos, etc.)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictures of Latinx children or families or adults</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources, materials, therapeutic items (e.g., manuals) translated to Spanish</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing or household items made of traditional fabrics, prints, or materials</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Group Discussion

- Have you provided racial socialization to your clients/families?

- Are there things in your therapy space that communicate racial socialization/cultural sensitivity/awareness?

Group Discussion (optional)

- How can we do a better job at having families feel comfortable talking to us about race, racial stressors, and racial traumas?

- Have you all discussed race and/or racial trauma incidents in therapy, if so what worked? If not, what do you think would be effective?
Case Example and Discussion

- 12 year old African American female client diagnosed with anxiety.
- The client’s foster mother reported that last week the client’s close friend was racially harassed and physically assaulted after a disagreement with peers, and he is currently in the hospital. Although the client was not there, her peers sent her clips on social media of the incident and she watched the clip “over and over” while crying hysterically. Her mother reported that since this incident the client appears to have increased arousal, nightmares about the video, problems sleeping, problems concentrating, she appears angry and tense, and is isolating herself from peers. However, she refuses to talk about the incident or her feelings with her White foster care family.

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Questions?