



Symposium/Other Proposal

2019 APA Annual Convention

Proposal ID: sym19182

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| 1. Type of program: | Conversation Hour |
| 2. Title of program: | Did that just happen? Responding to microaggressions committed by psychotherapy clients in session |
| First index term | 48 Multicultural |
| Second index term | 11.10 psychotherapy/treatment-methods |
| 3. Brief Content Description: | What happens when clients engage in microaggressions during therapy? We will discuss reactions and potential responses to client microaggressions aimed both at therapists' identities and other marginalized identities not held by the therapist |
| 4. Division to submit this proposal: | 29 - Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy |
| 5. Length of time requested on program: | 50 min. |
| 6. Chair(s) of the session: | |

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7. Participants:

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Title of presentation: The shoe on the other foot: What to do when client microaggressions are directed at the therapist?

Electronic Archiving: Yes

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Title of presentation: What to do When Client Microaggressions Are Directed at Identities Not Held by the Therapist?

Electronic Archiving: Yes

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8. Discussant(s):

9. Accommodation request: None
10. Submit for CE: False

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Did that just happen? Responding to microaggressions committed by psychotherapy clients in session

Just as clients bring their many cultural identities into the psychotherapy room, so too do therapists. As a profession, psychology aims to be inclusive and accepting of individual differences, with therapists striving for cultural competence. But what happens when the other side, the client, is not as self-aware? During counseling sessions, clients sometimes overtly or covertly send negative messages about those with diverse identities, including therapists who hold those identities. Because of societal standards, overt negative comments are not as common (Sue et al., 2007). It is more common for subtle forms of bias and prejudice to be said and, because they are subtle, they can at times be difficult to identify (Sue, 2010). These subtle messages are known as microaggressions.

Microaggressions can have damaging effects and are related to everyday prejudice, bias, and discrimination upon marginalized groups in our society (Sue, 2010). In relation to the therapeutic relationship, most of the research in this area focuses on how microaggressions affect individual clients or the populations we serve. There is limited to no research on how microaggressions affect the therapist when they are committed by the client. As a result, there is little guidance on how therapists can respond to such events. We, therefore, propose a conversation hour on this topic. We will guide participants in conversation about reactions and responses to both 1) microaggressions from clients that target identities held by the therapist and 2) microaggressions from clients that target marginalized identities not held by the therapist. We will consider a range of cultural aspects in this conversation hour, including (but not limited to) race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, and religion. We hope that participants will share their experiences and find some initial guidance on responding in these situations.

(1) The shoe on the other foot: What to do when client microaggressions are directed at the therapist?

The first presentation group will briefly share some of their own experiences in therapy when clients have engaged in microaggressions aimed at their (the therapists') cultural identities. Presenters will then facilitate a discussion with the audience about their own reactions to client microaggressions aimed at therapist identities and how microaggressions affect the therapeutic relationship. Discussion will move toward actual and potential responses to these microaggressions. Themes of therapist genuineness, client-therapist alliance, and social justice will be incorporated into the discussion.

(2) What to do When Client Microaggressions Are Directed at Identities Not Held by the Therapist?

The second presentation group will briefly share some of their own experiences in therapy when clients have engaged in microaggressions aimed at minority cultural identities that are not held by the therapist. Presenters will then facilitate a discussion with the audience about their own reactions to similar client microaggressions. Discussion will move toward actual and potential responses to these microaggressions. Part of this discussion will involve how these psychotherapy encounters may be used to foster social justice outcomes. If there is time, we will also discuss how therapist interventions may differ based on the format of therapy (especially individual versus group counseling).