

Using ChatGPT to Address Racial Microaggressions in Counselor Education

Many counselor educators lack training on how to facilitate discussions about racial microaggressions. This article proposes the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), specifically ChatGPT, to enhance counselor-in-training (CIT) cultural competence, allowing for practice with directly responding to racial microaggressions within counseling contexts. By engaging with artificial clients whose identities, beliefs, and experiences are shaped by tailored prompts, students shift their focus from performing competence to centering client experience. This approach bridges a knowledge gap in counselor education by offering a feasible method for training graduate counseling students to navigate complex cross-cultural dynamics. Implications and future directions related to AI-driven teaching practices are discussed.

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Racial microaggressions are subtle insults that harm people of color (Sue et al., 2007). These “put-downs” occur in everyday interactions, educational institutions and even in counseling spaces (Hook et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2021). Examples include explicit verbal attacks intended to offend as well as covert remarks that convey hidden biases. Racial microaggressions invalidate someone’s thoughts, feelings, or experiences; perpetrators may take actions that intentionally or unintentionally exclude others. Despite their often-invisible nature, the impact of racial microaggressions is measurable; they are associated with increased depression, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, and even have a detrimental effect on physical health outcomes (Williams et al., 2021). In counseling contexts, racial microaggressions can disrupt the therapeutic alliance when committed by either the counselor or the client.

Overwhelmingly, 81% of clients from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds have experienced at least one type of microaggression (Hook et al., 2016). We recognize that racial microaggressions are a byproduct of racism and generally stem from implicit bias, a phenomenon that counselors are not immune to. The need for counselors to foster awareness of their biases and prejudices is clear and results in the development of cultural competence (Hook et al., 2016; Williams & Halstead, 2019). Educators must be intentional in their approach to supporting students’ growth in their ability to avoid racial microaggressions.

Artificial intelligence (AI) holds strong potential across education and training programs. In a review of 47 studies, Roll and Wylie (2016) found that AI had been used across disciplines, including STEM, humanities, and social sciences, and primarily within formal school settings using desktop or laptop computers. Learning environments ranged from step-based problem solving to complex tasks and exploratory simulations, with both individual and collaborative structures (Roll & Wylie, 2016). This body of research lays the groundwork for exploring how AI can be adapted to meet the unique pedagogical needs of counselor education. The integration of AI into counselor education is an emerging trend in teaching and training practices. Young (2024), for instance, recently offered a teaching strategy that incorporated the popular AI platform Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT) to promote reflective practice within doctoral counselor education. ChatGPT, a chatbot designed for complex, insightful discussion and seemingly personalized exchanges, has also been explored as a tool for enhancing self-reflection, role-plays, and engagement in counselor training (Maurya, 2024).

We focus specifically on teaching counselors-in-training (CITs) about racial microaggressions for several reasons. First, the discreet subtlety of these communication-based offenses, paired with their frequent, everyday occurrence, makes racial microaggressions probable rather than merely possible within counseling contexts (Williams & Halstead, 2019). When these microaggressions occur, counselors of color may be impacted in-session, often expending significant mental and emotional energy to decide whether to ignore, address, or internalize the experience (Branco

& Bayne, 2020). This underscores the need for intentional training and practical preparation to support CITs in navigating the inevitability of client-initiated racial microaggressions.

Second, counselors are not immune to perpetuating microaggressions. Culturally competent counselors must strive to avoid committing harm through overt discrimination, insensitive comments or behaviors, or an invalidation of the experience of racialized clients (Nadal et al., 2014). Addressing this reality during training is critical for fostering ethical and reflective practice.

Finally, research indicates that most CITs, across racial backgrounds, report emotional responses to microaggressions training and a desire for more applied, practice-based learning opportunities (Dunn et al., 2022). Racial microaggressions are hidden yet pervasive, and CITs may be either unaware of how to recognize and prevent them or unsure of how to respond when they occur. Given this, there is a clear gap in counselor education that necessitates targeted, dynamic experiential strategies for addressing racial microaggressions specifically.

The current literature in counselor education offers limited guidance on how to train CITs to effectively address and respond to racial microaggressions. In one qualitative study, CITs identified didactic lectures, exploring case scenarios, and small-group discussions as helpful training methods (Dunn et al., 2022), all common pedagogical approaches used to develop skills and awareness related to multicultural counseling competency (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001; Dorn-Medeiros et al., 2020; Gonzalez & Cokley, 2021; Torino, 2015). The world of pharmacy education offers actionable strategies related to mitigating racial microaggressions as Kiles and colleagues (2022) offer guidance on how faculty can self-assess their teaching and prevent racial bias. Social work educators similarly have recommended activities to implement in the classroom (Kwong, 2020). Our teaching brief builds on these interdisciplinary insights to offer an innovative, simulation-based strategy designed to help CITs practice addressing racial microaggressions in counseling contexts, an area that remains underdeveloped in counselor education literature.

Given the effects of racial microaggressions, counselor educators must be equipped to directly address them in their classrooms (Acosta & Ackerman-Barger, 2017). However, many faculty members enter academia with limited training on how to facilitate discussions about such sensitive topics (Acosta & Ackerman-Barger, 2017). Despite this gap, it is essential for instructors to foster a deeper understanding of racism's mechanisms and to prepare CITs to address racial microaggression effectively, whether they occur in the classroom discussions or counseling sessions (Welton et al., 2015). This responsibility includes not only teaching students to recognize harmful dynamics related to racial microaggressions but also equipping them with skills to appropriately respond to instances of harm caused by racial microaggressions. Further, little is presently known about the feasibility of tools such as artificial intelligence as it relates to developing cultural competence among counselors-in-training.

Using ChatGPT as Instructional Strategy

While role-play activities can be effective learning tools that engage the reflective learning model in immersing students in the therapeutic environment, there may be limitations in how students approach skills within a role-play (Fominykh et al., 2017). Students may feel uncomfortable about presenting as clients with different cultural backgrounds and may struggle to contribute meaningfully to the role-play experience with limited knowledge about the case to be practiced. Additionally, there may be ethical considerations to address in asking students to enact culturally relevant details that reflect stereotyped attributes or lack cultural awareness.

For the present teaching innovation, we combine the experiential value of role-playing activities and case study discussions in the classroom with the rising interest in technology and artificial intelligence in educational settings. Artificial intelligence platforms, such as ChatGPT, may be able to diversely influence how we approach the experiential learning component of counselor education curriculum (Maurya & Cavanaugh, 2023). Many existing systems allow for users to replicate human-like conversations and seek information and guidance from chatbots that utilize machine learning and natural language processing algorithms. As such, counselor educators may be able to incorporate programs, such as ChatGPT, in the classroom to facilitate and demonstrate various interactions with clients. This process allows counselor educators to introduce students to the process of practicing realistic conversations with potential clients while ensuring that the classroom is a safe space to explore and make mistakes without causing harm. Building comfort with counseling skills often requires time and practice, which may be achieved for students early on when they are introduced to lifelike scenarios to create a foundation for their future client work.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING CHATGPT IN ROLE-PLAY

Counselor educators interested in using ChatGPT may first scaffold the practice activity by presenting a role-play session to the class. Using a predetermined prompt (see Appendix A) that explicitly frames the counseling context (e.g., wherein the counselor or client commits a racial microaggression), educators can facilitate a large-group discussion to identify the type of microaggression, process student reactions, and collaborate on potential counselor responses. This approach combines didactic instruction with experiential learning. Counselor educators may also wish to pause for reflective discussion or journaling following the group role-play to address any emotional responses that emerge. CITs can then attempt the same exercise individually, using the identical prompt to personalize their exchange with ChatGPT. Educators can remain available to support students and debrief after the activity, ensuring the learning remains culturally responsive and emotionally supportive.

We developed several case vignettes that speak to different themes or types of racial microaggressions that may potentially arise during client sessions (see Appendix B). These vignettes are structured within a specific prompt that can be entered into programs, such as ChatGPT, that will inform the AI about the roles of the user and the platform. Each vignette will clarify that the user is a counselor in a graduate-level counseling course and will be role-playing with the AI as a client. The program will also receive details regarding the client's information, such as name, age, cultural background, and presenting concerns. The prompt includes detailed instructions that highlight how the conversation will begin. These specific prompts emphasize that the counselor (the user) will engage in a racial microaggression in response to the client's (the AI) replies or vice versa, and that the goal of the role-play is for the counselor to learn how to appropriately handle the microaggressive situation. Counselor educators may edit these instructions per their classroom's needs as well as add any additional information that may be needed to authentically observe the interaction. While the present teaching brief is focused on the implications of racial microaggressions in the counseling space, this activity may also be tailored to consider intersectionality in client and counselor identities.

Once the platform receives the prompt and instructions, the counselor-in-training may begin speaking to the AI as they would to an actual client. Following a specified number of responses back and forth, the AI will end the role-play and provide feedback regarding the counselor-in-training's responses. This feedback will highlight both the positive elements of the interaction as well as critiques regarding areas for improvements. The AI can also be asked to specify how the racial microaggressions affected the session. This teaching brief includes several examples of vignettes that reflect various levels of discomfort or racial microaggressions that could come up within an actual counseling session. These vignettes may be altered as needed, as the prompt could be contextualized for multiple counseling courses. Foundational courses, such as introductory seminars and multicultural counseling, or advanced courses, such as those pertaining to counseling theories and diagnosis, may all benefit from the use of this activity, as it can be edited for the course content and student need.

Ethical and Multicultural Considerations

Of primary ethical concern is AI's inherent bias, as these systems are trained on existing data that may reflect and reproduce societal inequities (Schlesinger et al., 2018). As such, there is a risk that content generated by AI could inadvertently perpetuate racial stereotypes or oversimplify complex cultural dynamics. Counselor educators must remain critical of AI-generated content and ensure that it does not cause harm or reinforce oppression in higher education. Our approach establishes a psychologically safe space where students can reflect on and discuss their own encounters with racial microaggressions supported by the instructor's role as a facilitator who manages emotions and guides learning. We encourage counselor educators, however, to collaboratively develop ground rules with their students. These

classroom norms serve as the foundation for discussions involving racial microaggressions. The instructor, as facilitator of the classroom activity, is thus better positioned to manage students' emotions as they reflect on their own experiences of racial microaggressions.

To ethically address racial microaggressions requires acknowledging the distinct training needs of White students and students of Color. Gonzalez and Cokley (2021) emphasized that White students often need time to critically examine their racialized environments and confront White privilege as part of their development of cultural competence (Torino, 2015). For students of Color, classroom discussions may evoke strong emotional responses tied to personal experiences of racism (Haskins & Singh, 2015). These students may also feel tokenized when expected to serve as representatives of their cultural group (Seward, 2014). Additionally, questions remain about how students process their engagement with vignettes, particularly for those who have personally experienced racial microaggressions versus those who have not. Role-plays that infuse AI-generated cases mitigate the needs for both groups of students simultaneously, cultivating a more tailored, specific learning process.

The ethical considerations in utilizing ChatGPT in the classroom setting are important to highlight both during the initial preparation for the lesson as well as during instruction with students. ChatGPT cannot be used in place of academic research and clinical practice especially in determining appropriate next steps in working with potential clients. The function of the AI platform and utilization within the classroom is to provide students with an initial simulation to encourage query and discussion surrounding the process of addressing racial microaggressions within the counseling field. Students may not depend on the platform to reliably provide suggestions on how to respond to clients or to incorporate information about addressing racial microaggressions in their written work.

REFLEXIVITY

Previous studies have documented students' experiences with racial microaggressions in counselor education programs, including microaggressions related to their race, sexual orientation, and/or intersection of these identities (Bryan, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Vaishnav & Wester, 2023). These findings underscore the importance of counselor educators' ability to create an anti-oppressive learning environment and appropriately address racial microaggressions if they occur in classrooms. As counselor educators, we also recognize the inherent decision-making power in selecting reading materials, content covered, assignments, and activities utilized in a course. Therefore, reflecting on how our cultures and lived experiences may inform our intentionality and positionality as counselor educators is vital to connecting with students and facilitating their learning in a classroom.

The first author identifies as a Black, cisgender male with a strong professional identity as a school counselor. He has robust experience working in urban, suburban, and rural K-12 schools, which has informed his approach to counseling, supervision, and education as well as addressing racial microaggressions. The second author identifies as an Indian American, cisgender woman, and a daughter of immigrant parents. She draws upon her experiences as

a master's- and doctoral-level counseling student and the transition into clinical counseling work to better understand the gaps in current educational curriculum addressing racial microaggressions. The third author identifies as a Japanese American, cisgender woman, and a parent of a biracial child. She is aware that her intersecting identities of gender, age, race, ethnicity, and nationality have influenced her research interests and approach to teaching.

Continuous examination and reflection of oneself as a racial and cultural being is a critical step toward developing the awareness and skills necessary to address microaggressions effectively in classrooms (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). In writing this teaching brief article, we shared our experiences of being a student or a faculty of color in higher education with each other, as all of us believed that race and ethnicity have had and continue to have a significant impact on us both personally and professionally. We also discussed examples of racial microaggressions we have encountered, including incidents in which we might have been oppressors. Acknowledging our limitations and continued need for learning is an important aspect of modeling openness, vulnerability, and cultural humility to students.

We invite counselor educators to reflect on the following questions in preparation for utilizing the above-mentioned activity:

How do I feel about addressing the topic of racial microaggressions in class?

What concerns do I have about teaching this particular topic? What can I do to address these concerns? What support do I need?

What preparation would help students benefit from this activity?

What might be the potential benefits of this activity for students?

What might be the potential challenges of this activity for students?

What specific support can I provide to students who are triggered by the information shared in the activity?

What specific support can I provide to students who may be oblivious (e.g., operating from a color-blind ideology) to racial microaggressions and their impact on individuals?

Suggested Resources for Implementation

Didactic instruction can be helpful to strengthen one's understanding of how racial microaggressions may take form in counseling contexts. We recommend that counselor educators identify and assign readings ahead of class that define and explore racial microaggressions. Books such as *Microintervention Strategies: What You Can Do to Disarm and Dismantle Individual and Systemic Racism and Bias* (Sue et al., 2021) and *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* (Sue & Spanierman, 2020) may also be incorporated as supplemental educational

resources. When students are primed of the relevant content, they are typically more willing to engage in classroom activities.

We also recommend that broaching — the counseling skill of inviting dialogue about race, ethnicity, and culture (Day-Vines et al., 2007) — can be taught to CITs to reduce the likelihood of microaggressions and minimize their impact when they occur. By broaching, counselors acknowledge and validate racial differences, addressing potential worldview disconnects and fostering stronger relational dynamics (Day-Vines et al., 2020). Counselor educators may teach CITs to broach and serve as a model for broaching to help CITs navigate racial microaggressions. While counseling students may initially feel discomfort or pressure to “get it right”, structured practice opportunities, including role-plays, can alleviate apprehension and build confidence in directly addressing racial microaggressions by way of broaching race.

Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning can involve three areas of multicultural counseling competence, including awareness, knowledge, and skills. The following reflective questions are designed to encourage students to evaluate their responses to the client in a vignette in these areas. Student responses can also help a course instructor to measure student progress and areas for growth.

Awareness reflective questions: Who committed the racial microaggression in the vignette? What assumptions and biases did you have about the client in the vignette? d How might these assumptions and biases have influenced your interactions with the client?

Knowledge reflective questions: Which theme(s) of racial microaggressions is associated with the microaggression in the vignette? (see Sue & Spanierman, 2020 for a list of racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggression themes)

Skills reflective questions: What form(s) of racial microaggressions did you identify in this vignette? Who was affected by the microaggression? What impact did the microaggression have on the person? In what ways did you address a microaggression in this counseling relationship? and What impact did your response to a microaggression have on the client and the counseling relationship?

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Utilizing AI as an in-class activity is an innovative way to enhance the instructional value of experiential learning in the classroom, especially when considering the increasing normalization

of technological advancement. The design of AI platforms, such as ChatGPT, allows for instructors to easily operate and display the simulated session. Thus, this tool can be regularly accessed as needed. We have not created an account for this particular teaching practice, however, if students/instructors are interested in saving the conversation thread, an account would be required. The provided prompts can be submitted to ChatGPT in the chat box, which will then adapt the instructions to begin producing a conversation with an indicated client.

This activity has been observed for effectiveness through the first author's experience within a master's level introductory counseling course. The instructor reported that the large class size allowed for an open dialogue regarding the decision-making process, which encouraged a collaborative experience between students of various backgrounds. The nature of the AI system allows for the activity to be slowed down, as the platform does not require students to provide a response within a specific timeframe. This aspect of the activity offers opportunities for students to discuss in small groups or even as a full classroom discussion without feeling pressure to respond immediately. This may even promote the practice of utilizing silence in sessions and alleviate the initial awkwardness of taking pauses during sessions. However, this activity may only provide a foundational understanding, as this particular AI system would not allow for observation of physical factors, such as body language or tone of voice.

To assess the effectiveness of this activity, educators are encouraged to solicit input from students on their experiences using ChatGPT and responding to an AI-generated client. Example questions to be used in debriefing with students include but are not limited to: 1) How did the activity help you increase your understanding of microaggressions within a counseling relationship? 2) How did it help you learn skills for responding to microaggressions? 3) What limitations do you notice with this activity? and 4) What modifications, if any, would you make to the activity so that it would be most helpful to you? and 5) What else would you like me to know about your participation in the activity that the previous questions didn't address? Depending on the time constraint of a class and student engagement in group discussions, these questions may be posed as an exit ticket or a journal entry to allow each student to share their feedback on the activity with the instructor.

Incorporating feedback from students into follow-up discussions may help to enhance their learning in a collaborative classroom environment. For instance, students may state that details of the client's cultural and familial backgrounds are missing from virtual interactions. In response to this feedback, educators may brainstorm with students about how they might use broaching to gain a greater understanding of the client's culture, including intersecting identities and generational history that are salient to them. Some students may indicate that the counselor's cultural background needs to be added to the vignettes. In response to such feedback, educators may encourage them to explore further how counseling interactions might have been different if an AI-generated client were to receive some information about the counselor's cultural background. Brainstorming ways to use counselor self-disclosure (e.g., disclosing a counselor's invisible identity) in responding to microaggressions may also enrich group discussion.

Limitations and Future Directions

While AI-generated vignettes offer promising opportunities for counselor education, several unanswered questions and limitations remain. This teaching practice has been implemented in the first author's introductory counseling course; however, no empirical data was collected. Thus, there is a need to properly assess the effectiveness of using AI to practice responding to racial microaggressions. Another limitation of this work involves the platform itself, as AI may lack the capacity to convey nonverbal aspects of racial microaggressions (e.g., tone, body language, or subtle facial expressions). Nevertheless, it can still provide a starting point for exploring power, race, and culture. This limitation may be resolved by supplementing AI-generated scenarios with live role-plays or multimedia simulations to foster greater contextual awareness.

Future research should examine the impact of AI-generated vignettes on students' ability to effectively broach and respond to racial microaggressions in counseling contexts. Longitudinal studies could assess whether these tools lead to measurable improvements in students' cultural humility, empathy, and communication skills. In addition, research should investigate how to best support students from different cultural backgrounds as they engage with AI tools. For example, studies could explore how to balance the needs of White students navigating privilege and systemic oppression with the needs of students of color who may face emotional activation or tokenization. Relatedly, we deliberately focus on racial microaggressions, though microaggressions of other identities (i.e., gender, sexual orientation, age, faith) are similarly pervasive and impactful. Our proposed teaching approach may also be examined through a lens of intersectionality.

Researchers might also explore combining AI vignettes with augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) technologies to better simulate the nonverbal cues and relational dynamics present in real-life racial microaggressions. This integration could create a more immersive and comprehensive learning experience. For instance, virtual simulations may afford students who feel unsure of how to respond to microaggressions ample opportunity to practice broaching and microinterventions, which are essential to effectively address microaggressions in counseling. Exploring various ways (e.g., in-class activity, homework assignment, group project) virtual simulations can be used to increase students' awareness of microaggressions and skills to respond to them effectively in therapeutic settings would strengthen the existing body of literature in this area. Ultimately, the use of AI in counselor education represents an exciting opportunity to enhance learning, but it must be accompanied by intentional research, ethical consideration, and continuous adaptation to meet the needs of diverse student populations and counseling contexts.

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Appendix A

Prompt Used to initiate ChatGPT Role-Play

I am a counselor in a graduate-level counseling course, and I will be conducting a role-play with you as my client. You will be role-playing as a client seeking counseling. Please respond in character based on the following randomly generated client information:**

- ****Name:**** [Generated Client Name]
- ****Age:**** [Generated Client Age]
- ****Cultural Background:**** [Generated Client Background]
- **** Presenting Concerns:**** [Generate Client Concerns]

1. ****You will act as the client, and I (the counselor) will guide the conversation.**** I will start the session by committing a racial microaggression or responding to your statements. You should respond in character, as the client, based on the information provided above.
2. ****The goal of the role-play is for the counselor to learn how to respond to racial microaggressions made by the counselor or the client appropriately. You should respond authentically, as the client, sharing details about your background, challenges, and goals.**
3. ****We will engage in this role-play for up to five counselor responses. After the 5th counselor's response, the role-play will end, and feedback will be provided on the counselor's performance.****
4. ****The counselor should focus on recognizing racial microaggressions in counseling, handle them appropriately to build rapport with you, understand your concern within your cultural orientation, and communicate their respect to you.****

Appendix B

Example Case Vignettes for AI Clients

Vignette: The client is a 19-year-old, racially Black and White biracial man. The client speaks about feeling isolated on campus. Based on the client's appearance, the counselor assumes his race and asks the client a question, "What is it like for you to be one of only a few Black students in a predominantly White institution?"

Possible issues: monoracial ideology, stereotyping.

- ****Name:**** [Jordan]
- ****Age:**** [19 years old]
- ****Cultural background:**** [racially Black and White biracial, male college student]
- **** Presenting Concerns:**** [Feeling isolated on college campus due to racial microaggressions such as racial profiling and being perceived as a monoracial Black person.]

Start the role-play by inserting the counselor's question to the client below.

"What is it like for you to be one of only a few Black students in a predominantly White institution?"

Vignette: The client is a 17-year-old, White adolescent female who was self-referred to a counselor for anger management and familial conflicts in the past few months. She is from a lower socioeconomic background and has previously described her political stance as conservative. During their most recent session, the counselor asked Zoey how school was going and how she was getting along with her classmates, to which she replied, "It's fine, but it's Black History Month; and all of the Black kids are acting like they're special for some reason."

- ****Name:**** [Zoe]
- ****Age:**** [17 years old]
- ****Cultural background:**** [White female who is from a low-income family background and describes her political stance as "conservative." Feels marginalized due to her family's economic background and perceives that students of color are treated better than she is due to their racial backgrounds.]
- **** Presenting concerns:**** [Experiences some conflicts in her family and struggles to cope with feelings of anger.]

Start by responding to the client's statement, "It's Black History Month and all of the Black kids are acting like they're special for some reason."