

Introduction

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS



Issue 6

Dear reader,

One year after the ACES Teaching Practice Briefs (TPBs) initiative launched, ACES leaders distributed a survey exploring the kinds of topics that ACES members were most interested in learning about. The most popular topic was clear: addressing microaggressions in the counseling classroom. This notion, though often difficult to navigate, represents a critical topic that all counselor educators ought to be aware of and willing to engage in. In this issue, Issue VI of the TPBs, authors thoughtfully share their own teaching innovations and instructional practices to help all of us learn to address microaggressions in our classrooms.

In the first brief, Young and Jackson introduce a training framework to foster inclusivity through evidence-based teaching strategies that respond to microaggressions in the classroom. In our second brief, Loury and colleagues present Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool to cultivate cultural competence among counseling students by practicing responding to racial microaggressions with AI. Next, Branco and Jones introduce teaching strategies to prepare counseling students for client-initiated microaggressions towards counselors and best practices in responding. Lastly, Várkonyi highlights how humanistic-oriented andragogy can be used to mitigate microaggressions in counseling classrooms and positively impact students' belonging and engagement.

In broaching the topic of microaggression responding, we recognize that no single themed issue and no single brief can provide all of the answers needed for counselor educators to be fully equipped in their classrooms. But we hope that this issue begins dialogues about how counselor educators can more consistently and actively respond to microaggressions to create healthier, more inclusive classrooms. We also hope this issue can serve as a launching point to begin the hard work that many of us need to do in reflecting on our own responses (or lack thereof) to microaggressions in our classrooms and universities.

This issue also presents a milestone we have not yet encountered in the 3-year history of the TPBs—a shift in editorship. Since the TPBs were created in 2022, Dr. Javier Casado Pérez has served alongside me as co-editor of the TPBs.

Sincerely,
Clare Merlin-Knoblich
Co-Editor, *Teaching Practice Briefs**

Dr. Casado Pérez shaped key foundations to the TPBs that still guide its work now, including a review process grounded in equity pedagogy. They also dedicated numerous hours and efforts to reviewing manuscripts, providing feedback to authors, and editing briefs so that they could be published in our first six issues with the hope of reaching counselor educators in meaningful ways. Though Dr. Casado Pérez's term as co-editor ends June 30, 2025, their impact as inaugural co-editor will always be felt in this publication.

The new co-editor of the TPBs, Dr. Susan Branco, will launch her editorship with Issue VII of the TPBs. A call for this issue is already open, and we encourage you to consider submitting your own teaching innovations and instructional strategies to the TPBs for publication consideration.

* Are you interested in submitting your own evidence-based counselor education teaching innovation or instructional strategy to a future issue of the *Teaching Practice Briefs*? Visit acesonline.net/TeachingPracticeBriefs to view calls for briefs and corresponding deadlines.

Contents

Navigating Microaggressions: Impacts on Counselor Professional Identity Development and Instructional Strategies for Inclusivity

Jennifer Young and Desiree Jackson

Using ChatGPT to Address Racial Microaggressions in Counselor Education

Jacoby Lory, Anjali Badrinath, and Atsuko Seto

Out of the Shadows and into the Classroom: Preparing Counselors-In-Training for Microaggressions from Clients

Susan F. Branco and Connie T. Jones

Inclusive Andragogy: Fostering Classroom Environments Free of Microaggressions through Humanistic-Oriented Learning

Orsolya Várkonyi

Navigating Microaggressions

Impacts on Counselor Professional Identity Development and Instructional Strategies for Inclusivity

In this brief, we explore the impact of microaggressions on counselor professional identity development, particularly among marginalized groups. Drawing on current research, we highlight the unique challenges faced by counselors and counselors-in-training (CITs) in addressing microaggressions within academic and professional settings. To address these challenges, we introduce the Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework. This teaching strategy fosters inclusivity and better prepares CITs to navigate microaggressions effectively. The framework outlines evidence-based teaching strategies grounded in research. It promotes cultural humility, professional growth, and resilience among CITs by offering practical tools that counselor educators can implement in training environments.

JENNIFER YOUNG¹
& DESIREE JACKSON²

¹University of the Cumberlands

²Grand Canyon University

KEYWORDS

*microaggressions, counselor training,
professional identity*

Introduction

Counselor professional identity (CPI) development is a foundation of the counseling profession, shaping how counselors approach their work, build relationships, and address professional challenges (Dollarhide et al., 2023). CPI is a developmental process that integrates personal and professional values, skills, and knowledge, directly influencing counseling professionals' effectiveness and cultural competence (Lile, 2017). Educational and professional environments play a crucial role in this development, but microaggressions pose a significant barrier.

Defined by Sue et al. (2022) as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities,” microaggressions can undermine confidence, self-efficacy, and belonging, particularly for counselors from marginalized groups (Broadwater, 2020; Griffith, 2024). This brief addresses these challenges by introducing a structured instructional strategy, *the Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework*, designed to equip counselors and counselors-in-training (CITs) with the tools to recognize, reflect on, and respond to microaggressions. This framework fosters an inclusive learning environment, advancing CPI development and promoting cultural humility. While recognizing, reflecting, and responding have been utilized in various fields, including conflict resolution and anger management, the instructional strategy presented here is tailored to counselor education (Goldstein et al., 1998). The Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework is designed to equip CITs with the skills to identify, contemplate, and effectively address microaggressions within therapeutic settings.

COUNSELOR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND BARRIERS

CPI evolves through personal values, worldviews, educational experiences, clinical training, supervisory relationships, and ongoing professional growth (Maurya & DeDiegol, 2023). This dynamic process is influenced by milestones, achievements, and challenges that can either strengthen or hinder a counselor's sense of self within the profession. Relationships play a pivotal role in fostering CPI. Connections with peers, instructors, and supervisors help counselors refine clinical skills, navigate ethical obligations, and develop a sense of belonging in the profession (Peters & Vereen, 2020). Supervisory relationships enhance skill development, while mentorship supports addressing barriers and promoting professional growth. Building a sense of community within the counseling field mitigates challenges and creates opportunities for continued development (Gibson et al., 2023).

Microaggressions are a barrier to CPI, undermining confidence, belonging, and identity development. Marginalized counselors often face unique challenges due to systemic inequities and intersectional identities (Avent et al., 2019). For instance, women counselor educators report experiencing microaggressions that expose power imbalances and systemic discrimination, highlighting the need for institutional support to mitigate harm (Avent et al., 2019). CITs

frequently encounter microaggressions from clients, leading to emotional distress but also opportunities for contextualization and growth (Sackett et al., 2023).

Counselors of color often brace for racial microaggressions, employing strategies to manage these encounters, which impact their well-being and professional identity (Branco & Bayne, 2020). Non-binary counselors report experiences of misgendering that harm their mental health and sense of belonging (Griffith, 2024), while counselors with disabilities face ableist microaggressions that compound challenges in their professional roles (Cook et al., 2024). Addressing barriers like microaggressions through education, mentorship, and training is necessary for developing a strong CPI. By navigating challenges and using adaptive strategies, counselors can strengthen their professional identity and promote inclusivity in the field.

IMPACTS OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions impact marginalized groups within the counseling profession, affecting their mental health, sense of belonging, and professional identity (Griffith, 2024). Non-binary counselors frequently experience misgendering and invalidation, which contribute to feelings of alienation and diminished professional efficacy (Griffith, 2024). Counselors of color often navigate racial microaggressions that undermine their confidence and sense of belonging in educational and professional settings (Branco & Bayne, 2020; Oates, 2023). These challenges highlight the systemic barriers faced by marginalized counselors.

Systemic factors, which include ableism and intersectionality, further exacerbate these experiences. Counselors with disabilities encounter ableist microaggressions that challenge their professional credibility, while those with intersecting marginalized identities face compounded discrimination that amplifies the effects of microaggressions (Cook et al., 2024). Women counselor educators also report microaggressions stemming from power dynamics in academia, underscoring the need for systemic change to foster inclusivity (Avent et al., 2019).

CITs are vulnerable to microaggressions in clinical and educational settings. Client-initiated microaggressions present unique challenges, requiring CITs to simultaneously manage emotional reactions, maintain therapeutic alliances, and uphold professional composure (Sackett et al., 2023). In classroom settings, microaggressions can create a “toxic rain” effect, causing personal harm and distracting from learning (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). The “toxic rain” effect refers to the metaphor that captures how seemingly small but consistent negative experiences, including microaggressions, institutional neglect, and anti-immigrant sentiment, can accumulate over time like acid rain, corroding an individual’s emotional well-being, self-concept, and sense of belonging (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). This effect emphasizes how long-term exposure to social and legal invisibility and barriers to educational and occupational opportunities slowly weakens development, leading to diminished aspirations and identity conflicts. CITs often rely on support systems and contextualization strategies to navigate these encounters, underscoring the importance of mentorship and supervisory relationships in their professional development.

Identity affirmation and resilience act as protective factors against the adverse effects of microaggressions. Resilience-building strategies, including fostering self-efficacy and community support, are essential for maintaining professional identity and effectiveness (Harper, 2024). Counselor education programs are critical in addressing these challenges by integrating frameworks such as relational cultural theory (Sackett & Jenkins, 2019) and resilience theory (Pack-Butler, 2022). However, there remains a need for targeted interventions within counselor education to address the impacts of microaggressions and promote inclusive environments explicitly.

RATIONALE FOR THE INTERVENTION APPROACH

While studies have broadly examined microaggressions, specific investigations into their impact on the professional identity development of counselors and CITs remain limited (Broadwater, 2020). Research highlights the prevalence and effects of microaggressions but often overlooks their implications for identity development within educational settings (Raheem et al., 2014). Current training programs frequently lack structured strategies to help counselors effectively navigate these experiences (Broadwater, 2020).

Many counselors report feeling unprepared to address microaggressions in their professional roles. Studies on racial and gendered microaggressions reveal that these subtle acts of discrimination can lead to emotional distress and diminished professional efficacy (Barnes, 2011). Counselors often encounter these challenges in client interactions, workplace environments, and supervisory relationships, where microaggressions erode self-confidence and self-efficacy (Broadwater, 2020; Oates, 2023). Addressing this gap is critical for developing comprehensive training strategies that promote resilience, inclusivity, and professional growth.

To meet these challenges, we present the Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework, an approach tailored to counselor education. This framework, supported by evidence-based teaching strategies, provides a structured method for equipping counselors with the skills to navigate microaggressions effectively and develop cultural humility and professional competence. The following section introduces a teaching innovation designed to equip CITs with a tool for recognizing, reflecting on, and responding to microaggressions.

Teaching Innovation/Instructional Strategy

The Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework is a structured, evidence-informed instructional strategy tailored to the unique needs of counselor education. This approach equips CITs to address microaggressions effectively while fostering cultural humility, professional growth, and relational skills. Combining experiential learning, reflective practices, and skill-building micro-interventions, the framework introduces a

novel, practical method for navigating microaggressions and enhancing professional identity development.

Grounded in relational cultural theory (RCT), the framework emphasizes mutual empathy and relational growth, preparing CITs to approach microaggressions with cultural humility and understanding (Sackett & Jenkins, 2019). Role-playing exercises and guided discussions provide experiential learning opportunities, allowing CITs to engage actively with realistic scenarios, develop critical self-awareness, and enhance their multicultural competencies (Houshmand et al., 2017). These interactive strategies ensure that CITs are deeply involved in their learning and equipped to navigate complex interactions in diverse contexts.

The framework also integrates resilience theory to help CITs manage the emotional toll of microaggressions. Through building resilience, counselors can maintain professional composure and support themselves and others during challenging interactions, empowering them to remain effective and grounded in their practice (Pack-Butler, 2022).

The framework incorporates targeted prompts and reflective exercises that enhance professional identity and equip CITs to respond to microaggressions with confidence, self-awareness, and inclusiveness. This approach addresses critical gaps in counselor education, fostering equitable practices and preparing culturally competent counselors capable of addressing systemic inequities and supporting diverse clients (Rudecindo et al., 2025).

INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLYING THE RECOGNIZE, REFLECT, RESPOND PROCESS

The Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework helps CITs identify, analyze, and address microaggressions while fostering professional identity and cultural humility. Implementation is divided into three steps: Recognize, Reflect, Respond, each designed to build competencies in counselor education classrooms. (Please see Appendix A and B)

Preparation

Preparation begins with educators explaining the framework's purpose and role in equipping CITs to navigate microaggressions effectively. This explanation includes an overview of microaggressions, their definitions, examples, and their impact on counseling relationships, referencing foundational research. Educators should create realistic role-playing scenarios that reflect diverse identities and contexts, ensuring inclusivity and relevance (Branco & Jones, 2021). Role cards, case studies, reflective prompts, video clips, and popular culture reference materials should be prepared to enhance engagement during the Recognize phase.

Suggested Resources for Implementation. Educators can use several resources to enhance the implementation of the framework. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016) provide a foundational guide for integrating cultural humility, reflexivity, and inclusivity into training. Annotated research articles on microaggressions,

resilience theory, and relational cultural theory deepen understanding and promote evidence-informed approaches (Skinta & Torres-Harding, 2022). These tools support the development of cultural competence and empower future counselors to create inclusive and equitable professional environments (Ratts et al., 2016). By integrating these resources into their curriculum, educators can enhance their strategies and better prepare CITs to address the challenges of microaggressions.

Optional Format and Considerations

Implementing the framework requires adherence to ethical principles, including cultural humility, respect for diversity, and equity promotion. Ethical counselor education emphasizes creating inclusive learning environments rooted in self-reflection and cultural awareness. To enhance engagement and accessibility, the Recognize phase can integrate videos or pop culture references depicting microaggressions as an alternative to traditional role-playing.

Videos from films, television, or documentaries offer tangible illustrations of microaggressions. Carefully selected clips showcasing subtle or overt behaviors, such as dismissive comments about someone's cultural background, provide CITs with concrete examples of microinsults or microinvalidations, two types of microaggressions. These materials serve as conversation starters, facilitating discussions about the microaggressive behavior's intent, impact, and underlying dynamics. Social media interactions or viral moments can also highlight microaggressions in relatable ways, bridging theoretical concepts with practical applications while fostering critical thinking about cultural dynamics.

This optional format supports diverse learning styles, encouraging CITs to engage with the material in thought-provoking and accessible ways. Observing microaggressions in various contexts helps CITs recognize their prevalence and develop the skills to identify and address them effectively. Incorporating media-based approaches complements traditional role-playing, enriching the Recognize phase with an additional layer of experiential learning.

Cultural Adaptation of the Framework. To increase the applicability of this framework across various settings, it is essential to consider how cultural factors may influence both the experience of microaggressions and the appropriateness of intervention strategies. While the framework emphasizes cultural humility, further adaptations may be needed to address specific cultural values, communication styles, or systemic dynamics present in different regions or communities. For example, some cultural groups may prioritize indirect communication or collectivist values, which could shape how microaggressions are perceived and responded to (Farber et al., 2021). Educators are encouraged to adapt scenarios, examples, and reflection prompts to reflect the lived experiences and cultural backgrounds of their CITs. This cultural tailoring can promote greater relevance and effectiveness, reinforcing the importance of intersectionality and context in counselor training.

Opt-out Option. The framework incorporates an opt-out option to ensure inclusiveness and respect for the psychological safety and comfort of all CITs. This option acknowledges individual boundaries while maintaining the integrity of the learning objectives, allowing all participants to engage meaningfully in ways that align with their comfort levels. CITs opting out

of direct role-playing or immersive activities can participate through alternative methods. For example, they may engage in observational analysis, observing peers in role-playing scenarios and providing written or verbal feedback on the dynamics and strategies employed. CITs may also conduct case study analyses, independently or in small groups, examining written or video examples of microaggressions. These analyses are supplemented with reflective journaling or group discussions to deepen insights. Another option includes creative projects developing educational resources like infographics or guides focused on recognizing and addressing microaggressions. CITs may also engage in anonymous reflection by submitting private reflections to the instructor or participating in anonymous journaling. This approach provides a safe space for CITs to process their thoughts and emotions without the pressure of public discussion.

THE RECOGNIZE PHASE

The Recognize phase of the framework emphasizes cultivating real-time awareness of microaggressions and their impact within professional settings. CITs engage in thoughtfully designed activities, specifically role-playing scenarios and video analyses, to explore how microaggressions manifest and influence interpersonal dynamics. These exercises are tailored to reflect real-world counseling situations, incorporating diverse identities and the complexities of power dynamics to ensure relevance and depth.

Instructors facilitate this phase by assigning the counselor, client, or observer roles within role-play activities or simulated interactions. CITs are provided with detailed case studies, role cards, and video recordings to immerse themselves in these scenarios. These materials offer concrete examples of verbal, behavioral, and environmental microaggressions, helping CITs analyze interactions from multiple perspectives. Educators use prompts like “What occurred in the interaction that might be perceived as a microaggression?” and “Who might be impacted, and how?” to guide critical thinking and foster awareness of the dynamics at play.

To further enhance their situational awareness, CITs are encouraged to incorporate mindfulness practices that attune them to the subtleties of interpersonal interactions. Through observing and identifying microaggressions, ranging from microassaults and microinsults to microinvalidations, CITs develop a nuanced understanding of how these behaviors affect relationships, identity, and emotional well-being. This phase prioritizes experiential learning to provide CITs with the foundational skills needed to recognize microaggressions effectively. By stepping into these roles, CITs gain firsthand insight into the subtle yet impactful nature of microaggressions and their potential consequences on professional relationships and clients’ well-being.

The Recognize phase lays the groundwork for deeper reflection and equips CITs with critical observational skills needed to address systemic inequities and foster cultural humility. This foundational understanding prepares them to engage meaningfully in the subsequent stages of the framework, which focus on reflection and constructive response.

THE REFLECT PHASE

The framework's Reflect phase is designed to help CITs process their observations and experiences from role-playing scenarios or media analyses. It fosters deeper introspection and critical thinking about the dynamics of microaggressions. This stage emphasizes the importance of thoughtfully analyzing interactions to understand their emotional, relational, and systemic implications.

CITs engage in guided reflection activities, journaling, small group discussions, and instructor-led debriefs. These methods provide safe and supportive spaces for CITs to explore their thoughts, share insights, and connect their reflections to their professional growth. Educators facilitate these activities using structured prompts, such as "What emotions did you experience during the activity?", "How did the microaggressions influence professional relationships or the therapeutic alliance?", and "What are the broader implications of these interactions for counseling practice and professional identity?"

Reflection activities encourage CITs to move beyond immediate reactions and critically examine the systemic and interpersonal dynamics. Through this process, they deepen their understanding of how cultural factors, power dynamics, and personal biases shape professional relationships. Group discussions foster collaborative learning by allowing CITs to gain multiple perspectives, while journaling provides a private space for deeper introspection.

Educators play a pivotal role in guiding CITs through this phase by facilitating critical discussions about the complexities of microaggressions. Key questions, such as "How does this behavior relate to cultural, social, or personal biases?" and "What are the potential effects on the client, myself, or the therapeutic relationship?" help CITs unpack the nuances of these interactions. These prompts also encourage CITs to critically evaluate the ripple effects of microaggressions on both individual and systemic levels, helping them connect their reflections to broader professional and societal contexts.

The Reflect phase aims to cultivate self-awareness, cultural humility, and a nuanced understanding of systemic inequities. Engaging in guided reflection, CITs develop the ability to identify how microaggressions affect themselves, their clients, and the counseling profession. This phase lays the groundwork for the next stage of the framework, where CITs will focus on developing constructive strategies for responding to these challenges in professional practice.

THE RESPOND PHASE

The Respond phase of the framework equips CITs with evidence-based micro-intervention techniques to address microaggressions constructively, professionally, and empathically. Building on the awareness and insights gained in earlier phases, this stage focuses on helping CITs develop and refine practical skills to navigate challenging interactions effectively while preserving therapeutic relationships.

Educators begin this phase by introducing and modeling evidence-based micro-intervention strategies that include inquiry-based responses and affirming statements. For example,

phrases like “Can we pause and explore what you meant by that statement?” or “I hear your perspective, but I’d like to understand more about where that comes from” are demonstrated to promote dialogue and mutual understanding. These techniques encourage collaboration and empathy, allowing CITs to address microaggressions without conflict.

In high-pressure situations, counselors may feel caught off guard, emotionally activated, or uncertain about how to address microaggressions without disrupting the therapeutic alliance. To support CITs in these moments, the framework introduces structured response techniques that can be deployed in real time. These include grounding phrases such as, “Let’s pause for a moment. I want to make sure I understood what you meant,” or redirective statements like, “That comment may have a different impact than intended. Can we explore it together?” CITs are also taught brief self-regulation techniques like deep breathing, silent counting, or mindfulness anchors, to manage their own affect before responding. Role-playing exercises are intentionally designed to mimic escalating or emotionally intense scenarios, allowing CITs to practice staying composed, reflective, and ethically grounded under pressure. Emphasis is placed on tone, pacing, and nonverbal communication, allowing CITs to practice diffusing tension while still addressing the harm in the moment.

CITs then participate in skill-building activities, including role-playing scenarios where they apply these strategies in controlled settings. Role reversals are incorporated to enable CITs to explore multiple perspectives, deepening their understanding of how microaggressions impact relationships. These exercises also contrast scenarios with and without interventions, emphasizing the importance of addressing microaggressions effectively. Throughout these activities, CITs receive constructive feedback from peers and instructors, allowing them to refine their approaches and build confidence in their responses.

An important component of the Respond phase is the integration of relational cultural theory (RCT) principles, which emphasize mutual empathy and relational growth (Ticknor & Averett, 2017). CITs are encouraged to consider how their responses can repair ruptures caused by microaggressions and help maintain trust within the therapeutic alliance. This focus on relational growth ensures that interventions address the immediate behavior and foster long-term understanding and connection. Key reflective questions guide CITs as they practice and refine their responses, including “What is an appropriate way to address this behavior while fostering understanding?” and “How can I repair potential ruptures in the therapeutic relationship?”

CITs can develop the skills to address microaggressions with professionalism, cultural humility, and emotional intelligence. This equips them to navigate similar challenges in real-world counseling settings while maintaining professional composure and fostering relational integrity and growth. The Respond phase empowers CITs to handle microaggressions with empathy and confidence, preparing them to create inclusive and supportive environments in their practice. By the end of this phase, CITs demonstrate the ability to implement actionable strategies that strengthen the therapeutic alliance and promote cultural humility in counseling relationships.

DEBRIEF AND WRAP-UP STEP

The debrief and wrap-up conclude the activity, ensuring that CITs leave with a clear understanding of key lessons and their practical applications. Educators summarize the primary takeaways, emphasizing the importance of cultural humility, reflexivity, and professional composure when addressing microaggressions, reinforcing the foundational principles of the Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework, and helping CITs connect the activity to their CPI. Educators share additional resources containing research articles, toolkits, or videos that deepen CITs' understanding and support the real-world application of their skills, enhancing their ability to address cultural and systemic factors impacting counseling relationships.

Evaluation and Assessment

Targeted metrics assessing inclusivity and counselor identity development can evaluate the effectiveness of instructional strategies for addressing microaggressions in counselor education. Reflective journals, competency assessments, and feedback surveys measure progress in recognizing and addressing microaggressions while fostering cultural humility and resilience (Raheem et al., 2014).

Classroom climate surveys and structured evaluations, which include role-play and scenario-based assessments, provide evidence of CITs' ability to respond effectively to microaggressions and track changes in understanding, confidence, and real-world readiness. Reflective journals also encourage introspection and allow educators to assess growth in self-awareness, cultural humility, and critical thinking (Griffith, 2024). Educators can use these methods to refine instructional approaches, ensuring training programs effectively address microaggressions while fostering culturally competent and inclusive counseling professionals.

SUPERVISION AND PEER SUPPORT IN NAVIGATING MICROAGGRESSIONS

Supervision and external support systems, including peers and mentorship, can be viable avenues to support counselor trainees' process with discrimination and microaggressions (Chong et al., 2024). A supervisor's multicultural competence and cultural humility are fundamental for creating safety and openness in supervisory relationships. While supervision and peer support provide important external structures for navigating microaggressions, addressing the internal and emotional impact these experiences have on CITs highlights the need for strategies that promote emotional regulation and resilience.

Managing Emotional Responses to Microaggressions

Emotional responses such as frustration, fatigue, and sadness are valid and commonly experienced when engaging in diversity work. It is emphasized that the goal is not to suppress

these emotions but to acknowledge, process, and manage them in healthy and constructive ways (Miller et al., 2018). Counselors and CITs should be encouraged to develop reflective practices, set emotional boundaries, and seek community support. Regular debriefing, mindfulness exercises, and validation of emotional responses can foster resilience and sustainability in the profession (Miller et al., 2018). Encouraging counselor educators to model **emotional transparency and regulation** demonstrates to CITs how to respond without internalizing harm.

Microaggressions are not only cognitively strenuous but also emotionally distressing, often creating anxiety, anger, and trauma-related symptoms (Skinta & Torres-Harding, 2022). Counselors and CITs may experience emotional fatigue or hypervigilance in environments where microaggressions are frequent (Skinta & Torres-Harding, 2022). Teaching counselors how to regulate these responses is essential for preserving well-being and professional effectiveness. Strategies that support resilience and regulation may include emotional regulation skills, mindfulness, peer support, and cognitive reframing skills. Counselor educators also have a role in fostering ways to build resilience, reduce harm, and validate emotional experiences (Skinta & Torres-Harding, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

The Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework is grounded in ethical principles that align with the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) Guidelines for Ethics and Best Practice (2011). Counselor educators have a professional obligation to promote learning environments that are inclusive, developmentally appropriate, and responsive to the unique needs of diverse counselor trainees (Ratts et al., 2016).

This framework is intentionally designed to honor the dignity and autonomy of all participants. Strategies such as opt-out options, reflective journaling, and observational alternatives ensure that trainees can engage meaningfully while maintaining their psychological safety. These practices uphold the ethical imperative to do no harm and support the creation of safe, respectful spaces for addressing culturally sensitive topics. The framework prepares CITs to identify and respond to microaggressions as ethical breaches that can undermine trust, therapeutic rapport, and professional integrity. By integrating cultural humility, critical self-awareness, and relational ethics, the framework fosters core values of justice, advocacy, and respect for the inherent worth of all individuals. Educators implementing this framework are encouraged to model ethical behavior by attending to power dynamics, facilitating respectful dialogue, and encouraging reflexivity in both classroom and supervision settings. These practices are critical for preparing culturally responsive counselors equipped to navigate ethical complexities in diverse clinical environments.

Limitations and Future Directions

While the Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training framework offers a structured and evidence-informed strategy for counselor education, several limitations should be acknowledged. The framework has yet to be formally evaluated across diverse institutional contexts and cultural environments, limiting its generalizability. Additionally, the reliance on role-play and reflective practices may not fully capture the complexity of real-time clinical dynamics or institutional barriers counselors might face in practice.

Personal and institutional barriers may also challenge the implementation of this framework. Counselor educators and CITs may have implicit biases that affect their ability to engage in these practices fully. Institutional resistance, a lack of administrative support, time constraints, or fear of disrupting classroom dynamics may also hinder the integration of anti-microaggression strategies. Addressing these obstacles requires a sustained commitment to equity, self-awareness, institutional advocacy, and faculty training to effectively model and support these efforts.

Future research should explore this framework's long-term effectiveness through qualitative and quantitative methods, particularly in diverse training settings. Studies could also examine how the framework impacts counselor self-efficacy, client outcomes, and perceptions of inclusivity in supervision. Expanding implementation across online, hybrid, and multicultural classrooms may enhance accessibility and relevance. Adaptations of the framework for use in continuing education and clinical supervision contexts would offer opportunities for ongoing professional development.

Implications

Addressing microaggressions in counselor education has far-reaching implications, shaping education, professional development, and multicultural training. Equipping students with tools to navigate microaggressions fosters inclusive learning environments. It promotes cultural humility, a key attribute for developing culturally competent counselors who can address systemic inequities and effectively serve diverse populations (Sue et al., 2022).

Integrating strategies to address microaggressions into training and professional development strengthens the foundation for culturally responsive practices. This work aligns with the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies by advancing self-awareness, social justice advocacy, and improved outcomes for marginalized clients (Ratts et al., 2016). However, gaps remain in research, specifically around the long-term impact of these interventions and the compounded challenges faced by counselors with intersecting marginalized identities

(Broadwater, 2020; Houshmand et al., 2017). Counselor training programs must incorporate anti-racist and equity-focused content while prioritizing diversity among faculty and students. These efforts create inclusive academic cultures that support marginalized communities and advance the counseling profession in necessary ways.

References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/Resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. (2011). *Best practices in clinical supervision*. <https://acesonline.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ACES-Best-Practices-in-Clinical-Supervision-2011.pdf>
- Avent Harris, J. R., Trepal, H., Prado, A., & Robinson, J. (2019). Women counselor educators' experiences of microaggressions. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 12(2), Article 2.
- Barnes, R. R. (2011). *Racial microaggressions, racial identity, and working alliance in cross-racial counseling supervision relationships between Black supervisors and White supervisees* [Doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Greensboro].
- Branco, S. F., & Bayne, H. B. (2020). Carrying the burden: Counselors of color's experiences of microaggressions in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 98(3), 272–282. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12322>
- Branco, S. F., & Jones, C. T. (2021). Supporting Black, Indigenous, and people of color counselors: Considerations for counselor skills training and practice. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 43(4), 28–300.
- Broadwater, A. (2020). *Microaggressions: The lived experiences of LGBT graduate CITs at a Southern University*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas].
- Chong, L. S., Scharff, A., Crawford, B. A., Aajmain, S., & Boswell, J. F. (2024). Prevalence and navigation of discrimination and microaggression experiences in psychotherapy and supervision processes among therapists in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 19(1), 69–77. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000494>
- Cook, J. M., Deroche, M. D., & Ong, L. Z. (2024). A qualitative analysis of ableist microaggressions. *Professional Counselor*, 14(1), 64–82.
- Dollarhide, C. T., Gibson, D. M., Brashear, K. L., Huynh, J., Marshall, B., & Robinson, K. (2023). Lessons from professional identity development literature: A qualitative content analysis. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 62(3), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12269>
- Farber, R., Wedell, E., Herchenroeder, L., Dickter, C. L., Pearson, M. R., & Bravo, A. J. (2021). Microaggressions and psychological health among college students: A moderated mediation model of rumination and social structure beliefs. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 8(1), 245–255.
- Gibson, D. M., Dollarhide, C. T., Brashear, K., Huynh, J., Marshall, B., & Robinson, K. (2023). The emergence of unique elective identities in the professional identity development research in the counseling profession. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 62(3), 222–232. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12277>
- Goldstein, A. P., Glick, B., & Gibbs, J. C. (1998). *Aggression replacement training: A comprehensive intervention for aggressive youth*. Rev. Research Press.
- Griffith, D. J. (2024). *The lived experience of non-binary counselors who encounter microaggressions: Impact on professional development* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University].
- Harper, D. J. (2024). *Positive identity affirmation and resiliency in QPOC supervisees: Protective factors against the experience of microaggressions in the supervisory working alliance* [Doctoral dissertation, Fielding Graduate University].
- Houshmand, S., Spanierman, L. B., & De Stefano, J. (2017). Racial microaggressions: A primer with implications for counseling practice. *International Journal for the Advancement of counselling*, 39, 203–216. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-017-9292-0>
- Lile, J. J. (2017). Forming a professional counselor identity: The impact of identity processing style. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 9(2), Article 13. <https://doi.org/10.7729/92.1163>
- Maurya, R. K., & DeDiegol, A. C. (2023). Exploring the Relationship Between Components of Professional Identity for Counselors. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 45(4), 282–296. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.45.4.01>
- Miller, R. A., Jones, V. A., Reddick, R. J., Lowe, T., Franks Flunder, B., Hogan, K., & Rosal, A. I. (2018). Educating through microaggressions: Self-care for diversity educators. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 55(1), 14–26.

- Oates, M. (2023). *African American Counselors' Described Experiences of Microaggressions from Minority Clients* (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University).
- Pack-Butler, V. (2022). *Exploring Black women licensed professional counselors' perceptions of managing responses to microaggressions in social settings* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University].
- Peters, H. C., & Vereen, L. G. (2020). Counseling leadership and professional counselor identity: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, 7(2), 99–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2020.1770143>
- Raheem, M. A., Myers, C. E., & Wickman, S. (2014). An investigation of ethnic identity development and counselor educators in their ability to recognizing racial microaggressions. *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 1(2), 15–26.
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44(1), 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035>
- Rudecindo, B., Kuo, P., Smith, W. A., Tao, K. W., & Imel, Z. E. (2025). Microaggressions and cultural ruptures in psychiatry: Extending multicultural counseling orientation to psychiatric services. *FOCUS*, 23(1), 9–18.
- Sackett, C. R., Mack, H. L., Sharma, J., Cook, R. M., & Dogan-Dixon, J. (2023). A phenomenological exploration of counselors-in-training's experiences of microaggressions from clients. *Professional Counselor*, 13(2), 145–161.
- Sackett, C. R., & Jenkins, A. M. (2019). Utilizing relational cultural theory in addressing sexism in the counseling relationship. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 14(4), 492–498.
- Skinta, M., & Torres-Harding, S. (2022). Confronting microaggressions: Developing innovative strategies to challenge and prevent harm. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 65, Article 100921.
- Suárez-Orozco C., Casanova S., Martin M., et al. Toxic Rain in Class: Classroom Interpersonal Microaggressions. *Educational Researcher*. 2015;44(3):151–160. Accessed June 2, 2025. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.24571251&site=eds-live&scope=site>
- Sue, D. W., Sue, D., Neville, H. A., & Smith, L. (2022). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Ticknor, A. S., & Averett, P. (2017). Using relational cultural theory in education research design. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 17(4), 373–384.

Appendix A

Three-phase Framework (Recognize, Reflect, Respond)

Phase	Goal	Implementation activities	Resources & Tools
Recognize	Help CITs identify microaggressions in diverse counseling contexts.	Provide definitions and examples of microaggressions.	Pop culture clips, case studies, or social media examples.
		Use role plays, case studies, video clips, or media-based scenarios.	Role cards and reflective prompts.
Reflect	Encourage CITs to analyze and process emotional, relational, and cultural responses.	Facilitate journaling, group dialogue, or reflective writing.	Reflective prompts and guided questions.
		Promote discussion of identity, bias, and emotional responses.	Articles on cultural humility and relational-cultural theory.
Respond	Equip CITs with strategies to address and respond to microaggressions ethically and effectively.	Practice assertive responses and micro interventions.	<i>Multicultural Counseling Competencies</i> (Ratts et al., 2016).
		Encourage role-play feedback and peer debriefing.	Resilience theory and ethical response guidelines.

Appendix B

INSTRUCTIONS

The *Recognize, Reflect, Respond to Microaggressions in Counselor Training* framework helps Counselor-in-Training (CITs) identify, analyze, and address microaggressions while fostering professional identity and cultural humility. Implementation is organized into three sequential steps:

Recognize

- Introduce the purpose of the framework and its relevance to counseling practice.
- Define microaggressions and present examples.
- Provide context on the impact of microaggressions in counseling relationships.
- Use realistic role-playing scenarios or inclusive examples that reflect diverse identities and contexts.
- *Prepare materials such as:*
 - Role cards
 - Case studies
 - Reflective prompts
 - Optional: video clips or pop culture references to enhance engagement

Reflect

- Facilitate guided reflection through group discussion, journaling, or targeted prompts.
- Help CITs explore their own emotional responses, cultural identities, and implicit biases.
- Support the development of professional identity and multicultural awareness through relational dialogue.

Respond

- Teach and model micro-interventions to address microaggressions in real time.
- Use skill-building activities such as behavioral rehearsal, role-playing, and peer feedback.
- Integrate resilience theory strategies to help CITs manage emotional strain and remain grounded in challenging interactions.
- Encourage the development of inclusive and ethically informed responses that align with professional standards.

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.

Author Note:

Jacoby Loury <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1293-1578>

Anjali Badrinath <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2856-568X>

Atsuko Seto <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6811-3971>

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. Artificial intelligence was used to generate the two sample vignettes as well as the instructions for prompt input to ensure uniformity in the teaching practice.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jacoby Loury, 408 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY, 14228.

JACOBY LOURY¹, ANJALI BADRINATH²,
& ATSUKO SETO³

¹University at Buffalo

²Montclair State University

³The College of New Jersey

KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence, race, microaggressions, counselor education, ChatGPT, case vignettes, role-plays

Using ChatGPT to Address Racial Microaggressions in Counselor Education

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.

References

- Acosta, D., & Ackerman-Barger, K. (2017). Breaking the silence: Time to talk about race and racism. *Academic medicine*, 92(3), 285–288.
- Arredondo, P., & Arciniega, G. M. (2001). Strategies and techniques for counselor training based on the multicultural counseling competencies. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 29(4), 263–273. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2001.tb00469.x>
- Branco, S. F., & Bayne, H. B. (2020). Carrying the burden: Counselors of color's experiences of microaggressions in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 98(3), 272–282.
- Brunsmma, D. L., Brown, E. S., & Placier, P. (2013). Teaching race at historically White colleges and universities: Identifying and dismantling the walls of whiteness. *Critical Sociology*, 39(5), 717–738.
- Bryan, S. E. (2018). Types of LGBT microaggressions in counselor education programs. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 12(2), 119–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2018.1455556>
- Day-Vines, N. L., Cluxton-Keller, F., Agorsor, C., Gubara, S., & Otobil, N. A. A. (2020). The multidimensional model of broaching behavior. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 98(1), 107–118.
- Day-Vines, N. L., Wood, S. M., Grothaus, T., Craigen, L., Holman, A., Dotson-Blake, K., & Douglass, M. J. (2007). Broaching the subjects of race, ethnicity, and culture during the counseling process. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(4), 401–409.
- Dorn-Medeiros, C. M., Christensen, J. K., Lértora, I. M., & Croffie, A. L. (2020). Relational strategies for teaching multicultural courses in counselor education. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 48(3), 149–160. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1002/jmcd.12174>
- Dunn, M., Chambers, C., Cho, J., & Cheng, M. (2022). Future counselors' voices: A qualitative investigation of microaggression training. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 50(4), 238–255.
- Fominykh, M., Leong, P., & Cartwright, B. (2018). Role-playing and experiential learning in a professional counseling distance course. *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 29(2), 169–190.
- Gonzalez, I. A., & Cokley, R. K. (2021). The case for a core anti-racist course for counselors in training. *Teaching and Supervision in Counseling*, 3(2), Article 4.
- Haskins, N. H., & Singh, A. (2015). Critical race theory and counselor education pedagogy: Creating equitable training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 54(4), 288–301.
- Hook, J. N., Farrell, J. E., Davis, D. E., DeBlaere, C., Van Tongeren, D. R., & Utsey, S. O. (2016). Cultural humility and racial microaggressions in counseling. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 63(3), 269–277.
- Kiles, T. M., & Chisholm-Burns, M. (2022). Five essential steps for faculty to mitigate racial bias and microaggressions in the classroom. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, 86(8), Article ajpe8796. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8796>
- Kwong, K. (2020). Teaching Microaggressions, Identity, and Social Justice: A Reflective, Experiential and Collaborative Pedagogical Approach. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 9(4), 184–198.
- Maurya, R. K. (2024). Using AI based Chatbot ChatGPT for practicing counseling skills through role-play. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 19(4), 513–528.
- Maurya, R. K., & Cavanaugh, T. (2023). *Counselor education in the era of ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence based chatbots*. <https://doi.org/10.18401/2025.15.1.1>
- Nadal, K. L., Griffin, K. E., Wong, Y., Hamit, S., & Rasmus, M. (2014). The impact of racial microaggressions on mental health: Counseling implications for clients of color. *Journal of counseling & development*, 92(1), 57–66.
- Roll, I., & Wylie, R. (2016). Evolution and revolution in artificial intelligence in education. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 26, 582–599.
- Schlesinger, A., O'Hara, K. P., & Taylor, A. S. (2018). Let's talk about race: Identity, chatbots, and AI. *Proceedings of the 2018 Chi Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 315, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3173574.3173889>

- Seward, D. X. (2014). Multicultural course pedagogy: Experiences of master's-level students of color. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 53(1), 62–79.
- Speciale, M., Gess, J., & Speedlin, S. (2015). You don't look like a lesbian: A coautoethnography of intersectional identities in counselor education. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 9(4), 256–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2015.1103678>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Sue, D. W., & Spanierman, L. B. (2020). *Microaggressions in everyday life* (2nd ed.). Wiley.
- Sue, D. W., Calle, C. Z., Mendez, N., Alsaidi, S., Glaeser, E. (2021). *Microintervention strategies: What you can do to disarm and dismantle individual and systemic racism*. Wiley.
- Torino, G. C. (2015). Examining biases and white privilege: Classroom teaching strategies that promote cultural competence. *Women & Therapy*, 38(3-4), 295–307.
- Vaishnav, S., & Wester, K. L. (2023). Microaggressions, mentoring, and connectedness: Doctoral students' experiences in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 62(4), 311–322. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12268>
- Welton, A. D., Harris, T. O., La Londe, P. G., & Moyer, R. T. (2015). Social justice education in a diverse classroom: Examining high school discussions about race, power, and privilege. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 48(4), 549–570.
- Williams, M., & Halstead, M. (2019). Racial microaggressions as barriers to treatment in clinical care. *Directions in Psychiatry*, 39(4), 265–280.
- Williams, M. T., Skinta, M. D., & Martin-Willett, R. (2021). After Pierce and Sue: A revised racial microaggressions taxonomy. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(5), 991–1007.
- Young, J. (2024). AI reflective practice and bias awareness in counselor education. *ACES Teaching Practices Briefs*, (3).

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."

Out of the Shadows and into the Classroom

Preparing Counselors-In-Training for Microaggressions from Clients

Counseling skills instruction in graduate counselor education programs prepares students to apply basic and advanced counseling techniques. While multicultural counseling skills are typically emphasized, discussions around addressing client initiated microaggressions towards counselors are notably absent. Microcounseling interventions ([MCIs] Branco & Jones, 2021) are adapted counseling skills that correspond with Sue et al.'s (2019) microintervention framework. In this teaching brief, we offer MCI instructional strategies that may be utilized across multiple counselor education courses.

SUSAN F. BRANCO¹
AND CONNIE T. JONES²

¹Counseling Department, Palo Alto University

²Counseling and Educational Development,
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Author Note:

Susan F. Branco: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0414-8921>

Connie T. Jones: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7014-8284>

We have no known conflicts of interests to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Susan Branco, Counseling Department, Palo Alto University, 1791 Arastradero Road, Palo Alto, CA 94304. Email: sbranco@paloaltou.edu

KEYWORDS

*microaggressions, microinterventions,
counseling skills, microcounseling
interventions*

Preparing Counselors-In-Training for Microaggressions from Clients

Counselors-in-training (CIT) gain counseling theory and clinical skills training as part of their standard curriculum. Specifically, accredited programs require a counseling practice course where students are exposed to basic and advanced counseling skills and experiential activities such as role plays to practice emerging skills (Council of Accreditation for Counseling and Related Programs [CACREP], 2024). Multicultural skill sets, such as broaching in counseling (Day-Vines et al., 2021), can be included in the counseling practice course to support students of all identities to expand their cultural responsiveness (CACREP, 2024). Despite research documenting minoritized student and counselor experiences of client initiated microaggressions towards them (Branco & Bayne, 2020; Gonzalez Vera et al., 2024; Sackett et al., 2023), limited knowledge exists on how to prepare students for these circumstances. Preparation can include, “...the effects of stereotypes, overt and covert discrimination, racism, power, oppression, privilege, marginalization, microaggressions, and violence on counselors and clients” (p. 36), which is a requirement of CACREP’s (2024) standards in the social and cultural identities course. In this teaching brief, we offer information on microcounseling interventions (MCIs) and corresponding instructional strategies to support CIT preparedness to ethically negotiate microaggressions towards themselves, colleagues, and/or clinical supervisors.

Literature Review and Rationale

Many minoritized counselors and mental health clinicians have experienced microaggressions by clients towards them in isolation and oftentimes without support (Branco & Bayne, 2020; Choe et al., 2024; Constantine et al., 2008; Hernandez et al., 2010; Tinsley-Jones, 2001). Ample evidence exists to illuminate the harm incurred to minoritized mental health practitioners who are targets of client microaggressions to include psychological, emotional, and physical disturbances (Ahn et al., 2020; Branco & Bayne, 2020; González Vera et al., 2024). Microaggressions from clients challenge even experienced clinicians who struggle to determine if and how to respond. Thus, such scenarios pose significant concerns for emergent mental health trainees.

For example, González Vera (2024) and colleagues explored the lived experiences of 10 clinicians in training of color. Their findings revealed participants’ experiences of discrimination mostly from White clients, strategies they applied to respond to microaggressions, and how the experiences personally impacted them. The latter category centered on emotional and behavioral responses that impacted their self-efficacy as clinicians in training and amplified their anxiety as new trainees. Some participants reported that their attempts to seek support

from supervisors and other clinicians in training either yielded minimal guidance or exacerbated the harm by dismissal or invalidation. Ultimately, participants noted the growth aspect of their experiences, including learning how to prepare to respond to future client microaggressions; yet such growth was reportedly garnered at the cost of clinicians in training mental health.

Additional research findings shed light on the microaggressive experiences of CITs in general (Smith et al., 2017; Vaishnav, 2021) and from clients specifically (Sackett et al., 2023). Sackett and colleagues' study (2023) shared the compelling experiences of CITs impacted by client microaggressions. Participants in their study described their surprise, discomfort, and uncertainty on how or if to respond to client microaggressions. Many described seeking out supervisory guidance to address the microaggression from their clinical site supervisors; however they notably did not share their client microaggression experiences with university supervisors. One participant reported that they attempted to do so and found their university supervisor's response to be invalidating. The researchers emphasized the importance of counselor educators and supervisors preparing and supporting CITs to navigate client microaggressions when the counselor themselves is the target. Yet counselor educator scholars have identified that training and supervision practices predominantly cater to White identifying CITs at the expense of equitable training for minoritized CITs (Branco & Bayne, 2020; Haskins et al., 2015; Haskins & Singh, 2015).

KNOWLEDGE GAP AND SOLUTIONS

Sue et al. (2019) described a microintervention framework for bystanders and targets to directly address microaggressions and macroaggressions. Microintervention strategies to address individual microaggressive perpetrators include: 1) "Make the 'invisible' visible" (p. 135), 2) "Disable the microaggression" (p. 135), 3) "Educate the offender" (p. 135), and 4) "Seek external intervention" (p. 135). Each microintervention aims to validate, support, and ally with the target of the microaggression. Microcounseling interventions ([MCIs] Branco & Jones, 2021) are basic and advanced counseling skills that correspond with the first three options in Sue et al.'s microintervention framework (2019). Branco and Jones (2021) suggested the fourth option of seeking support to align with CIT supervision and or consultation from supervisors, counselor educators, colleagues, and peer CITs. The MCI framework offers possibilities for CITs to intentionally consider the microintervention category that may be most appropriate for the client microaggressive scenario. Or they may seek support in clinical supervision and case consultation to develop an appropriate course of action. Table 1 outlines Sue et al.'s (2019) microintervention framework with corresponding microcounseling intervention skills (Branco & Jones, 2021).

Table 1 *Microintervention and Microcounseling Intervention Strategies*

Microintervention Strategy*	Examples*	Corresponding Microcounseling Interventions (MCI)**
Make the invisible “visible”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Undermine the metacommunication -Make the metacommunication explicit -Challenge the stereotype -Broaden the ascribed trait to a universal human behavior -Ask for clarification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reflection of content, Summary -Reflection of content, Restatement, Closed/open ended question -Confrontation -Information sharing, Psychoeducation -Closed/open ended question
Disarm the microaggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Express disagreement -State values & set limits -Describe what is happening -Use an exclamation -Use non-verbal communication -Interrupt and redirect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Confrontation, self-disclosure - Ethics (2014) -Immediacy -Immediacy, Silence -Non-verbal active listening -Paraphrase, Summary, Redirect
Educate the offender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Point out the commonality -Appeal to the offender’s values and principles -Differentiate between intent and impact -Promote empath -Point to how they benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Information sharing, psychoeducation -Reflection of meaning -Information sharing, psychoeducation -Empathic response -Information sharing, Psychoeducation
Seek external intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Alert authorities -Report the act -Seek therapy/counseling -Seek support through spirituality/religion/community -Set up a buddy system -Attend support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Alert clinical or university supervisor -Seek university sponsored or private counseling/therapy -Seek community support -Consultation with peers and colleagues -Attend university-based practicum and internship supervision

*Sue et al., 2019, p. 135

**Branco & Jones, 2021

Instructional Strategies for Counselor Educators

The following instructional strategies are meant to be scaffolded activities to best support student learning and skill acquisition. The activities can be utilized in courses about counseling practice and/or multicultural counseling (CACREP, 2024). The instructional strategies can be enacted both in online and in person modalities.

MCI IDENTIFICATION AND SKILL PAIRING

Researchers who have explored client microaggressions towards counselors recommend instructors and supervisors to include role play activities to support CIT preparedness in response to microaggressions (Anh et al., 2020; Branco & Jones, 2021; González Vera et al., 2024; Sackett et al., 2024). The instructors ought to initiate the role play activity by scaffolding the skills practice. Counselor educators may prepare CITs for MCI role play practice by implementing an identification and counseling skill pairing activity, described next. Using this strategy allows CITs to develop familiarity with the microintervention framework and possible corresponding MCI options.

Preparation

- Generate a large or small group discussion to identify potential client microaggression examples (e.g., microinsults, microinvalidations per Sue & Sue, 2007).
- Instructors and CITs may elect to use artificial intelligence (AI) generated microaggression examples if needed.
- Create a table with the collective group generated microaggression examples.

Implementation

- Next, CITs work in pairs or small groups to select a microintervention in response to each microaggression (e.g., “Make the invisible visible”; “Disable the microaggression”; “Educate the offender”; or “Seek external intervention” (Sue et al., 2019, p. 135).
- Once a microintervention category is selected; CITs generate possible microcounseling intervention responses and add them to the table.
- The instructor facilitates a large group discussion on each group’s MCI selection with emphasis on the rationale behind the MCI choice.
- The instructor also engages in exploration surrounding the experience itself of examining microaggressions. Example instructor prompts include, “what emotional or physical responses came up for you during this activity?” and “what strategies like

grounding or self-care activities can support you during this activity?” Responses can be shared with the large group or not dependent on CIT comfort level. Instructors can also assign a post activity individual reflection with similar prompt questions where CITs may privately share their responses to the activity.

Pre practice

- CITs draft potential counseling script responses based on their MCI selection.
- The instructor facilitates a large group grounding activity (i.e. square breathing, five senses) to support CITs to prepare for the role play.

MCI Role Plays

Once CITs complete the MCI mapping activity, they are ready for the MCI role play experiential. CITs can practice responding to client-initiated microaggressions using the MCI script responses developed in the mapping activity or they may improvise new MCI responses.

Preparation

The instructor creates or uses AI-generated case vignettes featuring microaggressions directed at counselors using the microaggression examples developed in MCI mapping activity. Next, the instructor assigns the counselor, client, and observer roles to groups of at least three CIT participants. Depending on time parameters, the role plays can be from five to 10 minutes in length. A minimum of three rounds of role play practice is needed to allow for each CIT to have an opportunity to portray the counselor, client, and observer.

MCI practice

In small groups, participants enact the scenarios based on their assigned roles. The observer takes detailed notes of the MCIs utilized in the role play. During the role play enactments, the instructor rotates among groups to observe and provide live supervision as needed. The instructor also reminds CITs to rotate their roles to experience each perspective.

Debrief

After the allotted role play time, the observers provide feedback on the MCIs and other counseling skills identified in the role play. The counselor and client role players also share how they experienced the role play including any discomfort portraying the microaggressive client or the targeted counselor. After all CITs have rotated through the three roles, the instructor can facilitate a larger group discussion sharing experiences and personal reactions to the MCI role play experientials. Like the pre-practice preparation, the instructor may offer the following prompts to facilitate the large group discussion, “What was it like to portray (the client, the CIT)?”, “What emotions or bodily sensations arose during the activity?”, and “How might the activity help prepare you for similar scenarios with actual clients?” In addition, instructors may close out the lesson with another grounding, breathing, or expressive activity to support CIT regulation and model wellness practices CITs may employ in practicum, internship, and post graduate clinical practice in response to microaggressions.

Table 2 Example AI Generated Case Scenarios with Corresponding MCIs

AI Generated Case Scenario*	Identified Microaggression	Microintervention**	Corresponding Microcounseling Intervention
Client statement to non-binary counselor, "I am really stressed. But, uh, before we go further, can I ask you something? I've never met someone who uses 'they/them' pronouns before. Isn't it confusing for people?"	Micro invalidation of non-binary pronouns	Make the "invisible" visible & Educate the offender	"Your question reflects a common misunderstanding about non-binary people. Using 'they/them' pronouns is a way for me to express my identity and feel comfortable" (Information sharing, Self-disclosure)
Client statement to an Asian identifying counselor, "It's just been one thing after another, and I feel like I can't catch a break. But, uh, I was actually wondering, do you think you really get what it's like for me? I mean, you must have had it easy, right? Asians are always so smart and successful."	Racial microinsult based on stereotypes	Educate the offender & Make the "invisible" visible	"It's important for us to have a space where we can talk openly and respectfully about your experiences" (Information sharing, empathic response) "What you just said is a stereotype that can be quite hurtful" (Confrontation, Information sharing)
Client statement to a counselor who uses a wheelchair for a spinal cord injury, "My partner doesn't seem to understand my depression, and it's causing a lot of arguments. But honestly, how do you manage to give advice on relationships when you must have so many limitations yourself?"	Ableism microinsult based on stigma	Disarm the microaggression & Educate the offender	"I hear that you're struggling with feeling understood and supported in your relationship, and that's very challenging" (Reflection of content and feeling). "What you just mentioned reflects a common misconception about differently abled people. It's important to recognize that everyone, regardless of their physical abilities, has valuable insights and experiences to share. Let's focus on your feelings and how we can work through the issues you're facing" (Information sharing, encourager)
Client statement to a Black identifying counselor, "It's a bit weird being here, you know? I mean, I was surprised when I saw that my therapist was... well, someone like you."	Microaggression based on racial discrimination	Make the "invisible" visible	"Help me understand what you mean by 'someone like me'?" (Open ended question)

*Open AI, 2024

**Sue et al., 2019

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A common CIT concern is how to a) ensure ethical practice when navigating client microaggression experiences, b) maintain the therapeutic alliance, and c) avoid any potential client harm (Ali et al., 2005; Anh et al., 2020; Branco & Bayne, 2020; Lee et al., 2005). Historically, practitioner experiences of client microaggressions were labeled as counter transference, hence, eliminating any further action in session with the client or in clinical supervision as unnecessary (Ali et al., 2005; Branco & Bayne, 2020; Lee et al., 2005). Such guidance maintained the status quo of practitioner silence and isolation. We posit that ethical guidelines can be adhered to without sacrificing support for the targeted CIT or counselor. Therefore, we recommend that ethical considerations are included in the MCI role play debrief and discussion. Instructors and clinical supervisors may facilitate an ethical decision-making model review with robust discussion in large and small groups. CITs will be encouraged to cite relevant American Counseling Association (2014) ethical codes that both promote client care as well as protect counselor wellness.

Artificial Intelligence. Instructor utilization of AI for case scenario generation adheres to ACA recommendations to, “...employ AI to create simulations or role-play exercises that reflect a broad spectrum of cultural contexts and client scenarios” (n.d.), and “Use AI to develop case studies that cover a wide range of human experiences, ensuring these materials are inclusive of different cultures, identities, and life situations” (n.d.). However, caution should be taken to verify that AI generated case studies are not biased, harmful, perpetuating stereotypes, or otherwise inaccurate.

Role Plays. Instructor precautions must also be taken to normalize CIT discomfort in portraying a role play client identity that differs from their own. To address this concern instructors may encourage CITs to employ cultural humility and empathy to assume the perspective of the portrayed client, much like they will do with real life clients. Cultural humility and sensitivity allow for curiosity without stereotyping (Schmidt, 2025).

REFLEXIVITY AND INTERPERSONAL AWARENESS

CIT experiences of client microaggressions can be psychologically, emotionally, and physically disturbing particularly as they enter the emergent stages of learning how to be a professional counselor (Branco & Bayne, 2020; Sackett et al., 2023). Branco and Jones (2021) encouraged instructors and supervisors to consider multiple strategies to address CIT reflexivity and interpersonal awareness to include Kocet and Herlihy’s concept of ethical bracketing (2014) where CITs can express their feelings and reactions to client microaggressions outside of session to limit any in session infiltration that could impede on the relationship. In addition, Branco and Jones (2021) recommended reflexive journaling prompts adapted from Guiffrida et al.’s (2019) work on navigating discriminatory clients. Prompts included, “When are other times you have experienced this kind of microaggression/racism?”; “How do/did you respond to such microaggressive/racist encounters in a non-clinical environment?”; and “What and/or who supported you in previous/similar microaggressive racist encounters?” (Branco & Jones,

2021, p. 292). Finally, we acknowledge the sensitive and painful nature of the topic and how, if left unattended or unaddressed, could incur unintentional harm to CITs in the classroom. For these reasons, instructors and supervisors must cultivate brave space (Arao & Clemens, 2013) classroom environments, facilitate discussions on CIT positionalities and intersecting identities per the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2016). We also recommend that instructors seek resources from supervisors, colleagues, and community to maintain their own wellness, particularly if instructors and supervisors themselves have been targets of client microaggressions or discrimination.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Instructors and clinical supervisors may immerse themselves in the literature that shares the experiences of microaggressions and discrimination that minoritized counselors may experience to build contextual understanding of the phenomenon. Likewise, they may review Sue et al.'s (2019) microintervention strategies in its entirety to glean additional instructional ideas, guidance, and resources. Additionally, Branco and Jones's (2021) work on microcounseling interventions and how to apply a full ethical decision-making model to address microaggressions in counseling sessions (Branco & Jones, 2023) could also be of benefit to instructors, supervisors, and CITs. Finally, supplemental resources that directly address racial trauma can support CITs, instructors, and supervisors to learn how to assess for racial trauma and or heal from their own experiences of racial trauma. To that end, Branco(2023) recommends the *UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Survey* ([UnRESTS] Williams et al., 2018) to assess for experiences of racial trauma and discrimination; and the racial trauma workbook, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Menakem, 2017), with the corresponding Cultural Somatics Institute e-course (<https://culturalsomaticsuniversity.thinkific.com/courses/cultural-somatics-free-5-session-ecourse>).

Instructional Strategy Evaluation

CITs could assess their preparedness to address client microaggressions in post-class reflections shared with the instructor. MCI role-plays may be recorded or observed in live supervision sessions to identify the MCIs utilized. Instructor and clinical supervisor training on the MCI strategies could also engage in journal reflections or brief surveys to assess their experiences and perceived readiness to support CITs to both learn about and acquire the MCI framework. CITs in practicum and internship courses could describe how they utilized the MCI framework to address client microaggressions at their sites during case presentations. Similarly, counselor educators and clinical supervisors could offer how MCI instruction prepared CITs to manage client microaggressions. They may also gauge if MCI instruction supported increased CIT disclosure in supervision of microaggressive client situations.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Student knowledge acquisition may be assessed via individual reflection posts and quizzes. Instructors can issue a case vignette where CITs must develop MCI responses and provide rationale for their MCI choice. MCI clinical skills assessment is embedded in the scaffolding role play strategy with instructor observation and feedback. Further evaluation can be garnered by assigning role-play videos to assess CITs ability to identify an approach from the microintervention framework and employ an MCI in the mock session.

Discussion and Implications

The microcounseling intervention framework offers training and supervision strategies for minoritized CITs to prepare for microaggressions from clients in clinical situations. The scaffolded assignment and the subsequent discussions offer CITs the opportunity to intentionally practice counseling skills that can address microaggressive clients. Moreover, the instructional strategies support robust facilitated discussions about how ethical guidelines can be applied to preserve the counseling relationship and the CITs mental health. For far too long, minoritized CITs and practicing counselors have managed client initiated microaggressions in silence and without support. The MCI framework and instructional strategies are one remedy to the isolation experienced by CITs. They also provide instructors and clinical supervisors opportunities to demonstrate their willingness and capacity to support CITs with microaggressions from client. Ultimately, MCI instruction supports a more inclusive and welcoming classroom environment for minoritized CITs specifically and all CITs in general.

LIMITATIONS

While the microcounseling interventions framework can offer multiple possibilities for instructional strategies to address client microaggressions, evidence of its efficacy does not yet exist. Therefore, future research gathering evidence to support the MCI framework is warranted. An additional limitation includes counselor educator and supervisor willingness and comfort level to engage in discussion and training involving the sensitive, and at times disturbing, topic of client microaggressions towards CITs. Those instructors and supervisors who are not in a consciousness level that acknowledges such scenarios exist and merit additional training and support would be challenged to effectively prepare CITs for responding to client microaggressions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

The MCI framework offers instructors and supervisors guidance to include instructional strategies that address the needs of minoritized and all CITs in counselor education. MCIs utilize

microintervention approaches (Sue et al., 2019) to address counselor directed microaggressions from clients and capitalize on basic and advanced counseling skills that are required learning in CACREP-accredited programs. Future researchers may enact further investigative inquiry on how well MCIs support and prepare CITs to address microaggressions and discriminatory client actions.

References

- Branco, S. F. (2023). Actionable Advocacy: Applying the Socially Just and Culturally Responsive Counseling Leadership Model. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 17(2). <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps/vol17/iss2/7>
- Branco, S. F., & Bayne, H. B. (2020). Carrying the burden: Counselors of Color experiences with client microaggressions in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 98(3), 272–282. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12322>
- Branco, S. F., & Jones, C. T. (2023). Microaggressions and racism: Navigating ethics to support Black, Indigenous, and People of Color counselors. *Counseling and Values: Spirituality, Ethics, and Religion in Counseling*, 68(2), 169–188. <https://doi.org/10.1163/2161007x-bja10006>
- Branco, S. F., & Jones, C. T. (2021). Supporting Black, Indigenous, People of Color counselors: Considerations for counselor skills training and practice. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 43(4), 281–300. <https://doi.org/10.17744/mehc.43.4.01>
- Ahn, L. H., Yee, S. E., Dixon, K. M., Kase, C. A., Sharma, R., & Hill, C. (2020). Feeling offended by clients: The experiences of doctoral therapists. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 68(2), 125–138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cou0000511>
- Ali, S. R., Flojo, J. R., Chronister, K. M., Hayashino, D., Smiling, Q., Torres, D., & McWhirter, E. H. (2005). When racism is reversed: Therapists of color speak about their experiences with racism from clients, supervisees and supervisors. In M. Rastogi & E. Wieling (Eds.), *Voices of color: First-person accounts of ethnic minority therapists* (pp. 117–133). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231662.17>
- American Counseling Association. (n.d.). Integrating AI and LLMs into counseling education: Ethical and inclusive approaches. Retrieved April 27, from <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/elements-list-entry>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/ethics/2014-aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation* (pp. 135–150). Stylus Publishing, LLC. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003447580-11>
- Choe, E. J. Y., Blake, J., Huenergarde, M. C., Wells, L. S., & Srisarajivakul, E. N. (2024). When you are the “other”: A scoping review of the experiences of clinicians of color working with White clients. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 71(3), 170–178. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000729>
- Constantine, M.G., Smith, L., Redington, R.M., & Owens, D. (2008). Racial microaggressions against Black counseling/counseling psychology faculty. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 86, 348–355. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2008.tb00519.x>
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs. (2024). *2024 standards*. <https://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024-Standards-Combined-Version-4.11.2024.pdf>
- Day-Vines, N. L., Cluxton-Keller, F., Agorsor, C., & Gubara, S. (2021). Strategies for broaching the subjects of race, ethnicity, and culture. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 99, 348–357. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12380>
- González Vera, J. M., Domenach Rodríguez, M. M., Navarro Flores, C., Vázquez, A. L., San Miguel, G. G., Phan, M., Wong, E. G., Klimczak, K. S., Bera, J., Papa, L., & Estrada, J. (2024). Invisible wounds: Testimony of microaggressions from the experiences of clinicians of color in training. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 18(4), 331–339. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000489>
- Guiffrida, D., Tansey, M., & Miller, D. (2019). A constructive approach to help counselors work with clients who express discriminatory views. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 97, 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12240>
- Haskins, N. H., Phelps, R. E., & Crowell, C. (2015). Critically examining black students’ preparation to counsel White clients. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 7(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/73.1077>
- Haskins, N. H., & Singh, A. (2015). Critical Race Theory and counselor education pedagogy: Creating equitable training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 54, 288–301. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ceas.12027>
- Hernandez, P., Carranza, M., & Almeida, R. (2010). Mental health professionals’ adaptive responses to racial microaggressions. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 41(3), 202–209. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018445>

- Kocet, M. M., & Herlihy, B. J. (2014). Addressing value-based conflicts within the counseling relationship: A decision-making model. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 92(2), 180–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00146.x>
- Lee, L. J. K. H. (2005). Taking off the mask: Breaking the silence-The art of naming racism in the therapy room. In M. Rastogi & E. Wieling (Eds.), *Voices of color: First-person accounts of ethnic minority therapists* (pp. 91–116). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231662.n6>
- Menakem, R. (2017). *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press.
- OpenAI. (2024). *ChatGPT* (July 23 version). <https://chatgpt.com/share/6764eb14-ad2c-800b-a860-f1750cab8257>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, 44, 28–48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035>
- Sackett, C. R., Mack, H. L., Sharma, J., Cook, R. M., & Dogan-Dixon, J. (2024). A phenomenological exploration of counselor-in-training's experiences of microaggressions from clients. *The Professional Counselor*, 13(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.15241/crs.13.2.145>
- Schmidt, R. B. (2025). The power of a patient's story: A practice in cultural humility. *Frontiers in Global Women's Health*, 6, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fgwh.2025.1498385>
- Smith, J. A., Chang, C.Y., & Orr, J.J. (2017). A phenomenological investigation: Microaggressions and counselors-in-training. *Journal of Creativity and Mental Health*, 12(2), 213–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2016.1243076>
- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271>
- Sue, D. W., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M. N., Glaeser, E., Calle, C. Z., & Mendez, N. (2019). Disarming racial microaggressions: Microintervention strategies for targets, White allies, and bystanders. *American Psychologist*, 74(1), 128–142. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296>
- Tinsley-Jones, H.A. (2001). Racism in our midst: Listening to psychologists of color. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 32(6), 573–580. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0735-7028.32.6.573>
- Vaishnav, S. (2021). Using photovoice to explore racial microaggressions experienced by doctoral students of color. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 14(2). <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/jcps/vol14/iss2/6>
- Williams, M. T., Metzger, I. W., Leins, C., & DeLapp, C. (2018b). Assessing racial trauma within a DSM-5 framework: the UConn Racial/Ethnic Stress and Trauma Survey. *Practice Innovations*, 3(4), 242–260. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000076>

Inclusive Andragogy

Fostering Classroom Environments Free of Microaggressions through Humanistic-Oriented Learning

Microaggressions in counselor education adversely impact students' belonging and engagement (Nyunt et al., 2025; Sanabria, Penner, & Domina, 2020; Warren & Bordoloi, 2023). Humanistic-oriented andragogy mitigates these challenges by fostering an inclusive classroom where cultural backgrounds are validated (Cénat et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2023; Maestripieri & Jurgensen, 2025). This article introduces key strategies, including diversifying course content (Schuermann et al., 2018), encouraging open dialogue (Silva, 2023), and integrating learning materials that reflect mentees' backgrounds to ensure engagement through multiple cultural lenses (Silverstein et al., 2024).

ORSOLYA VÁRKONYI

Department of School of Education and Human
Services, Clinical Mental Health Counseling,
Molloy University

Author Note:

Orsolya Várkonyi: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4738-4489>

I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Orsolya Várkonyi, Molloy University, 1000 Hempstead Avenue Rockville Centre, New York 11570. Email: Ovarkonyi@molloy.edu

KEYWORDS

*microaggressions, counselor education,
inclusive andragogy, cultural validation*

Humanistic-Oriented Andragogy for Addressing Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions in counselor education classrooms are often subtle yet damaging comments or behaviors that send negative messages to students based on their gender, race, sexuality, or other social locations (Cénat et al., 2025; Chen, Carboni, & Tutwiler, 2023). These instances can make marginalized learners feel unseen and stereotyped, preventing them from engaging with faculty and peers (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025). Pedagogy emphasizes structured, teacher-directed learning, whereas andragogy focuses on adult learners, fostering autonomy and practical application (Dougherty et al., 2020). Humanistic-oriented andragogy fosters self-worth and honors individual differences, collectively contributing to an inclusive andragogical model that enhances student success because of the effects of feeling belonging (Humphries & Clark, 2021). Humanistic-oriented andragogy is proactive in addressing microaggressions by establishing a classroom culture that explicitly validates and respects all mentees' cultural backgrounds and identities from the very beginning of the semester (Nyunt et al., 2025). Creating a microaggression-free environment is not the goal of humanistic-oriented facilitators because that would be impossible; instead, the humanistic-oriented andragogical approach creates an inclusive space where microaggressions can be identified, discussed and mitigated, ultimately fostering a more inclusive learning experience.

RATIONALE

Creating a truly inclusive learning space requires continuous self-reflection, course and self-adaptation, and deep engagement with students' lived experiences (Chen et al., 2023; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025; Dougherty et al., 2020). Humanistic-oriented andragogy reduces inequalities and social divisions because it fosters the development of self-worth and honors individual differences, leading to an inclusive learning milieu and academic success (Morris, Nelson, & Stahl, 2024; Sanabria, Penner, & Domina, 2020; Scott, 2020). Learning becomes productive when all mentees are provided with the opportunity to experience an appreciation of their diversity in an environment of genuine empathy, which is the emblem of humanistic-oriented andragogy (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018; Silva, 2023).

HOW HUMANISTIC-ORIENTED ANDRAGOGICAL STRATEGIES ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS IN CLASSROOM SETTINGS

Humanistic-oriented educators are proactive in addressing microaggressions by establishing a classroom culture that explicitly validates and respects students' cultural backgrounds and identities from the beginning of the semester (Nyunt et al., 2025). These educators recognize that learners of color often feel their identities and lived experiences devalued in traditional

academic spaces (Scott, 2020). To counteract these challenges, humanistic-oriented counselor educators implement practical strategies, such as:

- diversifying course content to ensure multiple perspectives are represented (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018)
- encouraging open dialogue where students feel safe expressing their viewpoints and experiences (Silva, 2023)
- providing learning materials reflecting students' diverse backgrounds, thus allowing students to examine content through multiple cultural lenses (Silverstein et al., 2024)

To mitigate the effects of microaggressions, where marginalized learners frequently experience a lack of recognition in academic settings, humanistic-oriented educators can design course materials that align with students' lived experiences (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025). Honoring students' individuality in the learning process fosters an environment where students feel empowered and actively engage in their education (Dougherty et al., 2020). Humanistic-oriented educators seek to foster self-worth and honor individual differences, collectively contributing to an inclusive andragogical model that enhances student success because they create a felt sense of belonging (Humphries & Clark, 2021).

Description of Humanistic-Oriented Andragogy

Humanistic-oriented andragogy is a practice where mentees can grow at their self-directed pace, and their multicultural differences are valued (Scott, 2020). Humanistic-oriented educators embrace their students' worldviews and acknowledge that optimal learning is achieved by allowing learners' personal needs and internal frames of reference to drive the learning process (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018). Humanistic-oriented andragogy facilitates growth, including interpersonal, cognitive, and emotional domains (Silverstein et al., 2024). The teaching practice places less emphasis on the accumulation of knowledge and more on how students' intersecting identities affect the integration of skills (Warren & Bordoloi, 2023). Humanistic-oriented educators believe knowledge integration occurs naturally in a supportive learning environment where microaggressions can be safely addressed and mitigated (Jayne & Stulmaker, 2019).

APPLICATION OF HUMANISTIC-ORIENTED ANDRAGOGY TO COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Humanistic-oriented andragogy effectively mitigates microaggressions when educators actively establishing an inclusive classroom culture by explicitly validating and respecting all students' cultural backgrounds from the start of the semester (Nyunt et al., 2025). Humanistic-

oriented educators know that learners of color often feel devalued in traditional academic spaces and ensure their identities are honored (Scott, 2020). Because microaggressions can prevent marginalized learners from engaging with faculty and peers, educators encourage open dialogue where students feel safe expressing their experiences (Silva, 2023). They normalize inclusion and actively counter microaggressions through continuous reflection, where students have a safe space to reflect on being microaggressed, and by modeling institutional advocacy on the faculty member's part (Chen et al., 2023). Humanistic-oriented educators recognize that mitigating the occurrences of microaggressions is a continuous challenge, and they do this by maintaining self-reflection, adaptability, and engagement with mentees' experiences (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025; Dougherty et al., 2020). Thus, fostering self-worth and belonging by creating an environment that honors individual differences is often lost when microaggressions occur (Humphries & Clark, 2021). Conversely, cultivating self-worth and belonging can occur when microaggressions are addressed and reduced in counseling classrooms. Next, I outline six key steps for implementing humanistic-oriented andragogy in counselor education, providing actionable strategies to address microaggressions and foster an inclusive learning environment.

IMPLEMENTING HUMANISTIC-ORIENTED ANDRAGOGY IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION TO ADDRESS MICROAGGRESSIONS

Step 1: Diversify Course Content

- Ensure multiple perspectives are represented to prevent cultural exclusion, which is often an effect of microaggression (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018).
- Incorporate diverse and cross-cultural examples to foster an equitable learning environment (e.g., facilitating discussions on culturally significant rites of passage, such as quinceañeras, bar/bat mitzvahs, or traditional coming-of-age ceremonies in Indigenous communities, to highlight diverse developmental experiences and perspectives).

Step 2: Curate an Inclusive Classroom Culture

- Explicitly validate and respect all mentees' cultural backgrounds from the start of the semester (e.g., host open discussion on identity and classroom norms) (Nyunt et al., 2025).
- Recognize that learners of color often feel devalued in traditional academic spaces and ensure their identities are honored (e.g., host open discussion on lived experiences in academic milieus) (Scott, 2020).

Step 3: Encourage Open Dialogue

- Facilitate discussions with students by sharing as a faculty member about how they, at times, microaggress others and have been microaggressed by others. Modeling

openness allows mentees to share how microaggressions impact their academic journey (e.g., facilitate discussions on bias and cultural responsiveness).

Step 4: Provide Learning Materials Reflecting Students' Diverse Backgrounds

- While diversifying course content ensures multiple perspectives are represented, this step focuses on directly aligning materials with students' lived experiences, making learning more personally relevant and empowering.
- Ensure course materials resonate with mentees' backgrounds and identities, fostering deeper engagement and connection to the subject matter (e.g., case studies reflecting various cultural narratives, such as Nigerian rites of passage in a developmental psychology class) (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025).
- Allow students to engage with content through multiple cultural lenses (Silverstein et al., 2024). For example, encourage discussions that compare counseling approaches across different cultural contexts, such as Indigenous healing traditions, Eastern mindfulness-based practices, and Western cognitive-behavioral frameworks, to highlight diverse perspectives in mental health and well-being.

Step 5: Normalize Inclusion and Actively Counter Microaggressions

- Implement continuous reflection exercises where students have a safe space to process experiences of microaggressions (e.g., pause and discuss harmful comments immediately) (Chen et al., 2023).
- Model inclusive behaviors and advocate for institutional support in promoting diversity and equity.

Step 6: Maintain Self-Reflection and Adaptability

- Engage in ongoing self-reflection as an educator to identify implicit biases and make necessary adjustments (e.g., give anonymous student feedback for course improvements multiple times a semester) (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2025; Dougherty et al., 2020).
- Adapt teaching strategies based on mentee feedback and evolving educational needs.

To further illustrate the impact of microaggressions in academic settings and the role of humanistic-oriented andragogy in addressing them, the following case study presents a real-world classroom interaction and its resolution.

CASE STUDY ON ATTENDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS DURING CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

During a lecture on maternal care in a human development class, a Black student shared her birthing experiences, including being mistreated by medical providers during consultations

and labor. A White male student responded, “I did not know your people go through something like this,” a clear microaggression that reinforced stereotyping. The professor suspended the discourse, validated the Black mentee’s experience, and highlighted that one’s words can unintentionally reinforce othering. With the counselor educator’s scaffolding, students reflected on how biases perpetuate inequalities. Then, the instructor incorporated case studies on Black maternal health into future lessons, ensuring diverse representation in course materials. A class feedback check-in reinforced the importance of inclusive discussions while modeling how to address microaggressions with empathy and accountability.

This case study exemplifies the key strategies discussed in this brief, demonstrating the importance of immediate intervention, reflective discourse, and curricular adjustments that integrate diverse perspectives. By fostering an environment where students critically engage with implicit biases, faculty can actively mitigate the effects of microaggressions, promote belonging, and enhance learning outcomes for all students.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Counselor educators must adhere to ethical teaching practices that actively address microaggressions and foster an inclusive learning environment. Oversight ensures alignment with professional ethics, such as the *American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics* and multicultural counseling competencies, which emphasize respect for diversity, equity in education, and the responsibility to challenge biases. Faculty should be guided by ethical principles that promote culturally responsive instruction, safeguard student well-being, and create learning spaces where all voices are valued (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018).

Humanistic-oriented andragogy focuses on dismantling societal power inequalities due to racial and cultural factors and how they manifest in the classroom setting (Maestriperi & Jurgensen, 2025). Research on teaching effectiveness indicates that students’ learning experiences are improved by having multiculturally competent facilitators of learning who pay attention to students’ unique cultural factors and seek feedback regarding the effectiveness of their teaching, an aspect of humanistic-oriented andragogy (Silva, 2023). Effective teaching is achieved when there is respect for diversity, which can be achieved when practicing humanistic-oriented andragogy (Silverstein et al., 2024).

DEMONSTRATED REFLEXIVITY AND INTRAPERSONAL AWARENESS ABOUT THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON THE CLASSROOM

Regarding instructors’ reflexivity and self-evaluation, I recognize that there must be ongoing discussions about culture and the effects of the diverse social locations of students and educators. I integrate gender-based, ethnic, and racial aspects into my identities and instructional practices. I recognize that educational contexts are still dominated by populations who possess Eurocentric and Western viewpoints. As a cisgender, bi-racial, White-passing immigrant female, I recognize that systemic oppression pervasive in social and educational

environments adversely impacts marginalized students' learning experiences and academic mobility. Therefore, I recognize the necessity for continued discourse about gender, oppression, racism, gender identity, and socioeconomic status and explore how educators like me perpetuate microaggressions and oppression in the classroom. I first had to become aware of my privileged ethnicity and culture because increased self-awareness allowed me to understand the biases and assumptions that often accompany my internalized White Eurocentric culture. I actively recognize how my culture constrains students and perpetuates microaggressions in academic environments, and I encourage peer educators to engage in similar reflections when use humanistic-oriented inclusive andragogy to address microaggressions.

RESOURCES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Humanistic-oriented andragogy fosters advocacy-based unique topic projects by helping students' sensitivity to diverse social locations and their skills concerning cultural, social, political, and environmental issues (Nyunt et al., 2025). In addition, unique topic projects connected to diversity encourage mentees to explore institutional and social-level problems, such as addressing racial trauma in higher education contexts and challenge them to find ways of advocacy for their proposed concerns (Sanabria, Penner, & Domina, 2020). For instance, when curating a foundational counseling skills course in most clinical mental health programs, humanistic-oriented andragogy suggests specific methods to organize the course that focus on skill development while sensitively addressing microaggressions during didactic training (Scott, 2020). Foundational counseling courses must be well-structured with carefully curated inclusion-focused content (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018). Further, humanistic-oriented andragogy ensures that gatekeeping practices clearly communicate the program and course expectations and consistently enforce them while being sensitive to learners' social locations (Silverstein et al., 2024). Lastly, providing continuous informal and formal assessments and feedback about mentees' racial and cultural sensitivity and their demonstration of inclusivity in the classroom is essential in facilitating mentees' growth and reducing microaggressions in classroom and field placement settings (Wickens et al., 2019).

Evaluation of Effectiveness of Instructional Strategy

Humanistic-oriented andragogy is effective because it focuses on the relationship between the instructor and mentee while modeling respectful communication between learners, fostering congruence, empathy, and unconditional positivity (Akella, 2019). Humanistic-oriented andragogy values learners' unique reactions to the course content and is vigilant of emerging issues that could adversely impact mentees' classroom experiences, thus effectively addressing potential microaggressions (Barrita et al., 2023). It also endorses unconditional

positive regard, which provides acceptance and encouragement because it respects mentees at all stages of their cultural and academic growth (Humphries & Clark, 2021). Acceptance is a humanistic-oriented andragogical staple, and in the context of instruction, unconditional acceptance does not mean that facilitators of learning abandon their professional roles as gatekeepers (Brown et al., 2024). Instead, course expectations are enforced collaboratively, where mentees' input is accepted and valued, thus modeling sensitivity (Chen et al., 2023). Humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning are vigilant about effective multiculturally sensitive instruction; therefore, they gather data on mentee satisfaction in multiple domains, such as teaching styles and multicultural competencies, leading to effective instruction.

Assessment Tools Used in Instructional Strategy to Assess Student Learning

Humanistic-oriented andragogy places less emphasis on accumulating knowledge and assessment and more on how mentees integrate skills from their unique social locations (Maestriperi & Jurgensen, 2025). However, facilitators of learning employ measurements to determine whether learners have achieved the desired results (Morris, Nelson, & Stahl, 2024). Once the desired outcomes are defined, qualitative and quantitative assessment methods are selected (Nyunt et al., 2025). Assessments may include learner-selected unique topic assignments that allow subjective reflection, quantitative multiple-choice exams that evaluate content knowledge, quizzes, and self-directed presentations (Sanabria, Penner, & Domina, 2020). Humanistic-oriented educators believe that growth is dynamic. However, accountability is essential to ensure that mentees are prepared to embark on their professional journeys (Scott, 2020). Humanistic-oriented andragogy evaluates within the standardized context while maintaining a supportive, collaborative, and egalitarian learning environment (Schuermann, Avent Harris, & Lloyd, 2018). For instance, humanistic-oriented educators provide mentees with clear learning objectives and rubrics for a specific course (Silva, 2023). Mentees can then create self-directed projects indicating competence (Silverstein et al., 2024). Humanistic-oriented andragogy ensures that qualitative and quantitative assessment types accurately measure course content, emphasizing the learning process more than solely on the results of measured outcomes (Joseph, 2020). Therefore, humanistic-oriented facilitators of learning focus on providing continuous feedback throughout the course, fostering optimal proficiency in the material while cultivating an inclusive learning environment where microaggressions can be effectively addressed (Jayne & Stulmaker, 2019).

Implications

Humanistic-oriented andragogy effectively accommodates scholars from diverse social locations and advocates for their needs in larger societal systems (Warren & Bordoloi, 2023). Honoring mentees' individuality is vital, along with creating a conducive learning environment that increases learners' potential for actualization and opening space for addressing microaggressions (Wickens et al., 2019). Humanistic-oriented andragogy fosters the development of self-worth and honors individual differences, ultimately leading to inclusion in the classroom. Learning becomes productive when all mentees are provided with the opportunity to experience an appreciation of their diversity in an environment of genuine empathy, which is central to humanistic-oriented andragogy (Maestriperi & Jurgensen, 2025).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Addressing the unique needs of learners experiencing microaggressions is a complicated process that requires continuous evaluation (Jayne & Stulmaker, 2019; Joseph, 2020). Measuring the effectiveness of inclusive practices also poses a challenge (Maestriperi & Jurgensen, 2025). Traditional educational evaluative practices may not capture the benefits of humanistic-oriented andragogy, making it harder to demonstrate their value (Morris, Nelson, & Stahl, 2024). Balancing inclusivity with curriculum standards may pose additional challenges (Nyunt et al., 2025). Humanistic-oriented counselor educators must ensure that all mentees meet the standard learning objectives set by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) while addressing individual needs (Sanabria, Penner, & Domina, 2020; Scott, 2020). Humanistic-oriented andragogical practices can ameliorate some obstacles but cannot entirely address deep-rooted systemic inequalities (Silva, 2023). Lastly, the success of humanistic-oriented andragogy can vary widely depending on the context and institutional resources (Silverstein et al., 2024). Consistent implementation across different settings can be challenging (Warren & Bordoloi, 2023). Acknowledging these limitations can help counselor educators and institutions support the effective use of humanistic-oriented andragogy, enhancing its impact on student learning and lessening the instances of microaggressions in the academic milieu (Wickens et al., 2019). Further investigation of course materials and how they impact mentees' sense of inclusion and continued research on strategies to mitigate cultural biases in educational research could provide valuable insights.

References

- Akella, N. (2019). Inclusive online classroom environments for non-traditional learners: A case study exploring the andragogical teaching and learning model. In L. Blankzoon, J. Blankson, & E. Ntuli (Eds.), *Culturally responsive pedagogy* (pp. 63–87). Information Science Reference/IGI Global.
- Barrita, A., Wong-Padoongpatt, G., Chang, R., Abreu, R. L., & Krishen, A. (2023). Internalizing the poison: A moderated mediation analysis of LGBTQ+ BIPOC college students' experiences with intersectional microaggressions. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 9(4), 373–391. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/stl0000375>
- Brown, E. M., Cabell, A., Gatabazi, R., Gong, J., Moran, D., Sudan, Z., Kyaw, T., Ardini, L., Heo, E., Dapaah-Afriyie, C., & Kazemi, S. (2024). We do this till we heal us: Black mental health professionals' experiences working with Black patients suffering from racial trauma. *Psychotherapy*. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/pst0000554>
- Cénat, J. M., Moshirian Farahi, S. M. M., Dalexis, R. D., & Corace, K. (2025). Antiracist training and the development of cultural humility in mental health care providers in ethnically diverse schools in Canada. *Canadian Psychology / Psychologie Canadienne*. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/cap0000414>
- Chen, J. A., Carboni, I., & Tutwiler, M. S. (2023). EDI skill-building tools: Preparing learners to effectively intervene in bias incidents. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 9(4), 419–434. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/stl0000377>
- Delgado-Guerrero, M., & Gloria, A. M. (2025). Multiple mentors matter: The transformative role of peer, staff, and faculty mentors on Black, Indigenous, and people of color undergraduates' commitment to persist. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/dhe0000667>
- Dougherty, A. E., Haddock, L., & Patton, J. (2020). Mindful andragogy to create inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Mental Health*, 16(3), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2019.1639092>
- Humphries, B., & Clark, D. (2021). Examining student preference for traditional didactic or chunking teaching strategies in an online learning environment. *Research in Learning Technology*, 29. <https://doi.org/10.25304/rlt.v29.2405>
- Jayne, K. M., & Stulmaker, H. L. (2019). Person-centered school counseling. In C. T. Dollardhide & M. E. Lemberger-Truelove (Eds.), *Theories of school counseling for the 21st century* (pp. 49–74). Oxford University Press.
- Joseph, S. (2020). Why we need a more humanistic positive organizational scholarship: Carl Rogers' person-centered approach as a challenge to neoliberalism. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 48(3), 271–283.
- Maestripieri, D., & Jurgensen, J. (2025). On the unity of knowledge: Integrating scientific and humanistic approaches in evolutionary psychology and a call for papers for a special issue on consilience. *Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*, 19(1), 1–13. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/ebs0000350>
- Morris, J. R., Nelson, K. L., & Stahl, M. A. (2024). University school training model: Dismantling anti-Blackness and eradicating racism through ecologically grounded training and systemic school reform. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 18(1), 98–104. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/tep0000456>
- Nyunt, G., Hutchings, Q., López, N., Dominguez, N., Hernandez, D. I., Santos, K., & Kpodo, F. (2025). 'I'm stuck and not sure what the solution is': Navigating higher education environments as racially minoritized higher education and student affairs master's students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/dhe0000673>
- Sanabria, T., Penner, A., & Domina, T. (2020). Am I failing at remediation? College remedial course taking, failure, and long-term student outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, 61(4), 459–484. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-020-09590-z>
- Schuermann, H., Arent Harris, J. R., & Lloyd, H. J. (2018). Academic role and perceptions of gatekeeping in counselor education. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 57(1), 51–65.
- Scott, S. L. (2020). Balancing discipleship and gatekeeping in counselor education. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 39(2), 104–113.
- Silva, J. M. (2023). Decolonial pedagogy and the undergraduate psychology classroom: Lessons from the intergroup relations course. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 9(4), 392–404. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/stl0000387>

- Silverstein, M. W., Miller, M., Rivet, J., & Nuhu, N. (2024). Program evaluation of a virtual mentoring program for BIPOC undergraduates in psychology. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*, 10(4), 431–441. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/stl0000322>
- Warren, M. A., & Bordoloi, S. D. (2023). Going beyond good colleagues: Men's and women's perspectives on allyship behaviors toward women faculty in male-dominated disciplines in academia. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 16(6), 745–758. <https://doi-org.molloy.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/dhe0000369>
- Wickens, C. M., Labrish, C., Masoumi, A., Fiksenbaum, L. M., & Greenglass, E. R. (2019). Remediation strategies for students affected by a university work stoppage: Comparing two institutions of higher learning. *Journal of Mental Health*, 16(3), 435–454.