Addressing Racial Trauma in Counseling: Perspectives and Lessons from the Field

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Abstract
Racism has permeated all aspects of our lives, whether we are directly or indirectly impacted by it and whether we are the beneficiary or victims of it. In the mental health field, racism systematically impacts clients and clinicians simultaneously. Studies have shown that racism can lead to psychological trauma characterized by symptoms similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). There is a shortage in the literature regarding counselors' specific approaches to effectively working with racially traumatized clients. Research has also pointed to an increased need for culturally competent and anti-racist mental health professionals to avoid further disenfranchising or retraumatizing. The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain insight into the experiences of Black mental health professionals working with racial trauma and to share their perspectives on how to best work with this population to further advance mental health training. Twenty-three (23) Black mental health professionals were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. A Thematic Analysis of the data revealed four common themes to working with clients who have experienced racial trauma: 1) Rewards and Challenges, 2) The importance of Self-Care, 3) The Importance of Implementing Culturally-Informed Clinical Strategies, and 4) The Importance of Engaging in Professional Growth and Development. Discussion of the findings include implications and recommendations for mental health practice, education, and research.

Keywords: racial trauma; race-based trauma; trauma; racism; trauma training; multicultural competency; trauma-informed practices

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Susan Kashubeck-West, Ph.D. - Chairperson
Angela D. Coker, Ph.D. - Committee Faculty Member (Advisor)
Sha-Lai Williams-Woodson, Ph.D. - Committee Faculty Member
Jerome Morris, Ph.D. - Committee Faculty Member