



Working with victims of Biased Acts

SUNY Oneonta Counseling
Center

**Melissa Fallon, Marta Guzmán,
Kimberli Andridge, Jeanne
Keahon, Brandon Roman, Shawn
Bubany**

Background on this Project

- Biased Act response team and procedures overhauled
<http://www.oneonta.edu/bias/>
- Bias Acts Response Team meets when an incident occurs
- Team member or student development member is assigned to be liaison to the victim/floor
- Victim's wishes are taken into account in terms of sanctions

Overhaul of Procedures

- Led to More reporting of Biased incidents
- Response of victims changed over time and led to dissatisfaction for victims because their desires/needs changed
- Request to the Counseling Center for resources to help victims think about all their possible reactions and to support victims help-seeking

Definition of a biased act

A bias act is conduct that adversely and unfairly targets an individual or group based on the social identity categories of national origin, ethnicity, race, age, religion, gender, gender identity & expression, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, color, creed, marital status or any combination of these characteristics. The perpetrators may be known or unknown and the act may be verbal, written or physical, and occur on the SUNY Oneonta campus or within an area that impacts the campus community. Some bias acts may reach the level of a legally defined hate crime. While all hate crimes are bias acts, not all bias acts reach the level of a legally defined hate crime because a hate crime requires an actual criminal act in addition to the perpetrators' bias.

What is Discrimination?

- Differential treatment of members of a group due to negative feelings/attitudes about the minority group.
- Micro-aggressions – seemingly “painless” but recurrent experiences of discrimination. → Cumulative effect
 - Blatant acts such as utilizing racial, homophobic slurs, hate crimes, physical and verbal aggression. → Stressful

(Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002)

Discrimination Stats

- 50% of perpetrators of hate crimes Nationally are under the age of 35 (US Dept of Justice, 2001)
- More than half of reported hate crimes are racially motivated
- People with disabilities, LGBTQ people, religious and ethnic minorities are also likely to be targeted

From APA (2013).The Psychology of Hate Crimes. www.apa.org

Discrimination against LGBTQ community

- Warrants further investigation
- Verbal harassment and intimidation are the most common forms of victimization of LGBTQ individuals (*Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 2003*)
- Creates psychological distress, leads person to question his/her own worth, and it is a symbolic form of VIOLENCE (*Garnets et al., 2003.*)

What are you seeing on your campuses?

- Types of biased incidents you hear about from your clients and faculty?

Most common types of biased incidents at SUNY Oneonta

- Majority of reports are biased graffiti in residence halls (white boards), especially first year student resident halls, but also in classrooms, restrooms
- Very small percentage is physical aggression based on the victim's identity
- Tokenism/negative stereotyping in the classroom/on campus

Literature Review

- Not a lot of literature on interventions or best practices in doing Counseling with victims of biased incidents
- Inconsistent results on existing research
- Relationship between discrimination and psychopathology is complex and multi-factorial (E.g. acculturative stress and ethnic identity play key roles)

Acculturation

- Acculturation implies leaving behind cultural norms and learning new ones
 - Dealing with new culture, new language- particularly relevant for immigrant/bilingual students
- “Acculturative stress”
 - Linked to depression, anxiety, and somatic symptoms

Ethnic Identity

- Ethnic identity - Shared culture, religion, geography, and language of individuals who are often connected by strong loyalty and kinship as well as proximity
- For minorities, ethnic identity is manifested in very conscious ways (parades, music events etc.), while for Caucasian individuals it is manifested through behaviors, values, beliefs and assumptions
 - Latent message that minority identity is less desirable, as it does not meet mainstream standards.

(Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999)

Acculturation vs. Ethnic Identity

- Acculturation, by itself, has been identified as **risk factor** for substance abuse in Asian youth (*Chou, Asnaani & Hofman, 2011*)
- Ethnic identity – considered a **protective factor** (*Chou, Asnaani & Hofman, 2011*)
- Further research is required

Multiracial people and Discrimination

- Evidence that multiracial college students had a greater perception of racial bias and identified with more experiences of physical discrimination than their mono-racial/Black and White peers.
- Looked at multiracial adults and how multiracial identity integration is a moderator variable for the relationship between perceived discrimination and psychological adjustment

(Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra, & Harrington 2012)

Multiracial people and Discrimination

- Multiracial identity development describes the flexibility and absence or presence of conflict in the person's identification with all their racial identities.
 - Racial distance – perceptions that one's racial identities are separate from one another – bi-racial person only identifying with one of their racial identities = very distant
 - Racial conflict – perceptions of conflict between the person's multiple racial identities – conflict or tension between the culture or values espoused by the person's multiple cultural backgrounds

(Jackson et al., 2012)

Multiracial people and Discrimination

- Individuals with better racial identity integration:
 - report higher levels of pride, better psychological adjustment, and more effectively deal with race-related stressors
 - Greater understanding, flexibility and resources in negotiating between their multiple racial identities

(Jackson et al., 2012)

Discrimination and Trauma

- Well established that discrimination > stress > negative psychological outcomes (depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, etc)
- Little empirical examination of whether discrimination is a form of trauma
- People of color have higher rates of PTSD (one study showed 33% of African Americans met criteria in an urban area)
- Movement toward a more fluid view of PTSD
- Growing belief that cumulative discrimination and personal violations contributes to trauma/PTSD
 - i.e. minorities living in a hostile racial climate
- This impacts academic success and degree completion at colleges

(Pieterse, Carter, Evans, & Walter 2010)

Discrimination and Trauma

- 324 people of color surveyed and 91.4% endorsed experiencing racial discrimination
- Racial/ethnic discrimination predicted trauma symptoms for 289 diverse college students
 - *perceived negative climate can influence trauma symptoms also
- Trauma responses are common psychological rxns; hypervigilance, avoidance, numbing, guilt/shame
- Common emotions after discrimination include: disrespect, anger/outrage, shock, helplessness, frustration/irritation, vigor/positive motivation

(Pieterse et al., 2010)

Help Seeking Behaviors

- After experiencing discrimination/bias act
 - 57% sought help, 43% did not
 - Family/Friends are most common source of support
 - Fewer than 10% sought help from a MH professional
- Vast majority either keep their incident to themselves, or seek help from others who can identify and are close to them (Carter & Forsyth, 2010)

Other Co-Occurring Problems correlated with discrimination

- Dating concerns
- Relationship/ trust problems
- Procrastination (particularly in women)
- Maladaptive eating (particularly in women)
- Anger/Irritability (particularly in men)
- Assertiveness and Shyness
- Concern about the future
- Homesickness
- Religious/Spiritual concerns
- Perfectionism
- Difficulty developing independence from family
- Stress management

(Chao, Malinckrodt, & Wei, 2012)

Possible short-term reactions

- Anger
- Desire to retaliate
- Confusion and self-doubt
- Numbness
- Deep sadness
- Increased stress
- Difficulties trusting others
- Feeling disrespected
- Feeling disappointed or betrayed

Possible short-term reactions

- Feeling frustrated, annoyed, or outraged
- Feeling shocked and in disbelief
- Feeling hurt and rejected
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Desire to dismiss or avoid the incident
- Embarrassment or shame
- Freezing and self-blame
- Wishing one could have done something differently

Possible reactions

- Individuals who have been the target of a biased act may feel unsafe and threatened. Similarly, witnesses or other members of the community may also experience discomfort and a general sense of danger. Biased acts affect everyone.
- Students are more likely to tell peers or family than to seek counseling or other help.
- Victims may struggle with fear of retaliation or fear of being misunderstood.

Possible Long-term reactions

- Soul Wound - Native American scholars describe the destruction of their culture as a "soul wound," from which Native Americans have not healed. A soul wound is characterized by deep pain, hopelessness, and a pervasive sense of injustice. If unattended, a soul wound may lead to anxiety, depression, and even low self-esteem.

Assessment in Counseling

- Assess for experiences of Biased acts & Discrimination as a regular part of intake
 - Integrate routine assessment of Major Depressive Disorder when working with Latinos
 - Assess for PTSD when working with African American individuals
- If the student has experienced discrimination assess for trauma-related symptoms/reactions
- Assess for the presence of other commonly occurring presenting problems
- Assess for student's experience of racial climate

Counseling Implications

- The client may fear that you will minimize the impact of the bias act or may have experienced other people minimizing their experiences
 - Normalize their experiences
 - Acknowledge your own biases and “check them”
- Having their experiences and reactions minimized may create further traumatization and soul wounds
- Attend to and process counselor/client differences in session.

Counseling Implications

- Foster the development or enhancement of protective factors
- Attend to the “just world fallacy” – If something bad happened to me, then I must have done something wrong
- Use strength’s-based approach
- Use trauma model for conceptualization and treatment
- Consider level racial identity development and the impact on reactions to discrimination
- Encourage Self-Care

Counseling Implications

- Empower the client
 - Increase community and on-campus connections
 - Help them advocate for themselves in the campus system
 - Making connections to fighters of cultural heritage. Finding people who encourage equality in all areas (racial, ethnic, sexual, ability) can inspire your clients. Reading about these people or getting involved with their causes can be cathartic, create change and help empower you clients.

Broader Implications

- Counseling centers should focus on developing workshops and outreaches that address cultural differences within the college community.
- Building campus support networks can be beneficial (GSA, ALAANA, HOLA)
- Educate public about potentially negative consequences of racial discrimination

Case Example:

- 20 year old, African American female
- Presents with the following complaints:
 - Depressed mood
 - Fleeting suicidal ideation
 - Isolated, socially withdrawn
 - Suspicious of volleyball teammates, as they “talk about [her] behind [her] back all the time”
 - Some disturbing nightmares

Case Example:

- You discover that she is the only student of color in volleyball team
- Has had experiences of tokenism in class and on the team
- Most of her social contact are teammates who are white

References:

- American Psychological Association Public Interest Government Relations Office Briefing Paper (2013). *The psychology of Hate Crimes*. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/issues/violence/hate-crimes.aspx>.
- Carter, R.T. & Forsyth, J. (2010). Reactions to racial discrimination: emotional stress and help-seeking behaviors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2 (3), 183-191. doi: 10.1037/a0020102
- Chavez, A. & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1999). Racial and ethnic identity and development. In *An Update in Adult Development Theory* (pp.39-49) Hoboken, N.J.: Jossey-Bash Publishers
- Chou, T., Asnaani, A., & Hofman, S. (2012). Perception of racial discrimination and psychopathology across three U.S. ethnic minority groups. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(1), 74-81. doi: 10.1037/a0025432
- Chao, R. C., Mallinckrodt, B., & Wei, M. (2012). Co-occurring presenting problems in African American college students reporting racial discrimination distress. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 43(3), 199-207. doi: 10.1037/A0027861.
- Garnets, L. D., & Kimmel, D. C. (eds.) (2003). *Psychological perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Huynh, Q., Devos, T., & Dunbar, C. M.(2012) The psychological costs of painless but recurring experiences of racial discrimination. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(1), 26-34. doi: 10.1037/a0026601
- Jackson, K., Yoo, H., Guevarra, R., & Harrington, B. (2012) Role of identity integration on the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and psychological adjustment of multiracial people. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 59 (2), 240-250. doi:10.1037/a0027639
- Pieterse, A.L., Carter, R.T., Evans, S.A., & Walter, R.A. (2010). An exploratory examination of the associations among racial and ethnic discrimination, racial climate, and trauma-related symptoms in a college student population. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57 (3), 255 – 263. doi: 10.1037/a0020102