

Contribution to Social Work Practice

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I have designed an entry-level workshop for gay white male therapists working with LGBTQ+ service users to explore our own white privilege and racism. Many of us choose to work with LGBTQ clients because of our experience being gay in the world. This brings an important lens to the work. As white men, however, our experience of homophobia can shortchange our exploration of how racism, white privilege, a white supremacy show up in our lives and work. In contrast to more widely-used, otherising models of cultural competence (Almeida et al., 2011), this workshop invites participants to explore their own lived experience and interrogate the multiple ways whiteness operates therein. It is based in part on Martin-Baró's idea of de-ideologizing everyday experience, zooming out to analyze how generally accepted ideas are imbued with history and power that shape how we interact with one another (Martin-Baró, 1994). I see this workshop as part of a series based on the tenants of liberation psychology. Other possibilities include a 201-level workshop that delves deeper into the ideas of power and privilege as they relate to race, and a session positioning our work within the context of the historical movement for queer and trans liberation. Together, these workshops represent a critical opportunity to continue cultivating awareness among white therapists on the the effects of whiteness in our work and building anti-racist, liberatory practices.

Works Cited

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- Southerners on New Ground (SONG) core organizing tools: <https://southernersonnewground.org/resources/organizingtools/>
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) political education toolkits: <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/resources.html>

Unpacking White Privilege and Racism 101: A Workshop for Gay White Male Therapists Working with LGBTQ+ Service Users

It is recommended that the group be limited to 10-12 members in order to facilitate deeper discussion and build trust among participants and the facilitator. The workshop should take place over the course of 2 days, though more or less time may be taken as per

Introductions

Invite participants to share their names, pronouns, and the gayest thing they've done this week. Any sort of icebreaker question can be substituted, but choose something that will get people laughing, invite some lighthearted vulnerability, and acknowledge the shared identity of the group.

Group agreements

Materials: Large paper, large marker, easel or painter's tape for the wall

Begin with a few group agreements listed on the paper to get the ball rolling. These might be things important to you, your organization, or the space that you're in. You may also choose to leave some of them off in hopes that they'll be offered by the group. Read them aloud and explain if necessary. Then invite group members to add their own at the group's discretion. Make sure everyone agrees on them before moving forward, and leave them hanging in a prominent place throughout the workshop so that the facilitator can refer back to them if necessary.

Some suggested group agreements:

- Use "I" statements when talking (speak from your own experience)
- No technology during the workshop
- Turn up your talking/turn up your listening (challenge yourself to do more of whichever feels more naturally difficult)
- Ouch/Call others in (identify when something someone said is hurtful or incorrect, then invite the speaker to consider things in a different light)
- Be open to learning new things
- Share your knowledge, feelings, and experience honestly and vulnerably

Goals

Materials: Large paper, large marker, easel or painter's tape for the wall

Write out the goals of the workshop (below) and share them with the group.

- Grow our understanding of what motivates us to do therapeutic work
- Grow our understanding of white privilege and racist oppression and how each shows up in our lives and work
- Explore and interrogate the ways in which our racial and sexual identities intersect and interact

- Disrupt the notion that whiteness is objective, neutral, or secondary to queerness in understanding our identities and humans and as therapists
- Make specific commitments to integrate this knowledge into our work

Motivations: Why do we do this work?

Materials: Paper; markers, crayons, or colored pencil; pens or pencils; a wall and tape or bulletin board with pins to hang the paper on

- Invite participants to draw and/or write something about why they got into doing therapeutic work with LGBTQ+ people. Give them 5-10 minutes to do so. Then have everyone share. As they share, tape them to an area of the wall or pin them on a bulletin board.
- Once everyone has finished sharing, have participants grab another sheet of paper and—using the *opposite* medium they choose the first time (either writing or drawing)—have them answer the capture a moment where they felt joy connected to their queerness. Allow everyone to share, then hang them in an area near the first group.
- Finally, have everyone use one more sheet of paper. This time they can choose either medium to describe a time when living as a gay man felt challenging. Invite people to share once more
- Explain to participants that this was to remind ourselves why we are here and the ways in which our identity informs the work that we do. It's also a reminder that being gay is a complex experience with elements that are shared and not. Invite members to reflect and share any observations they have about the drawings/writings.

Intersectionality: Understanding our positionality

Materials: Large paper with definition of intersectionality (below); a large copy or drawing of the Hierarchy of Power, Privilege and Oppression; stickers or post-its

Definition: Intersectionality argues that classifications such as gender, race, class, and other signifiers of identity cannot be examined in isolation from one another. They interact and intersect in individual's lives, society, and social systems and are mutually constitutive (Almeida, 2016)

- Pose the question: "What is intersectionality?" Lead a discussion, noting any key points offered by participants; share the definition above and make sure that participants understand the concept
- Share the image of the Hierarchy of Power, Privilege and Oppression. Explain the concept, and check for understanding by inviting discussion.
- Pair people off. If there is an odd number of people, pair someone with the facilitator. Have each person interview their partner, as though they were conducting a traditional biopsychosocial assessment. Instruct them to focus on the various axes of identity identified in the Hierarchy of Power, Privilege and Oppression (race, class, sexual orientation, gender expression, etc). It is not necessary to write anything down. The aim is to get each participant to vocalize their experience to someone else.

- After sharing their story with a partner, invite each person to place themselves on the hierarchy using a sticker. Participants may share briefly about their decision if they wish. Invite participants to discuss further once everyone has placed themselves.
- Discuss how these varied positions might inform the work we do.

De-ideologizing Everyday Experience: Where Do Our Ideas Come From?

Materials: Large paper for each small group and markers

- Divide participants into 3-4 small groups, giving each a large piece of paper and markers. Pose the questions below (you may choose to write them on large paper and post them in a visible place.) Have each group record their ideas on paper and share with the larger group.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - Where did you get the ideas about your sexuality? Think about people, media, formal education, etc.
 - How are these ideas passed on generationally, in your own family of origin or on a societal level?
 - How have these ideas changed over your life, and what work have you done to change them?
 - What harmful or outdated ideas continue to show up for you? How?
- In the same small groups, have participants record their answers to the questions below. Have them share with the larger group.
 - Questions for discussion:
 - Where did you get the ideas about whiteness and/or race? Think about people, media, formal education, etc.
 - How are these ideas passed on generationally, in your own family of origin or on a societal level?
 - How have these ideas changed over your life, and what work have you done to change them?
 - What harmful or outdated ideas continue to show up for you? How?
- Once everyone has shared these ideas, introduce the concept of de-ideologizing everyday experience. Invite people to further conversation about the ideas presented by each group.
 - Ask the group how the processes of learning about sexuality and race were unique? How has whiteness shaped each? Participants may consider the experiences they offered in the first exercise of the workshop re: what drew them to the work, joys, and challenges.

How Does Racism Show Up?: The 4 “I’s” of Oppression

Materials: Four large sheets of paper, each with a giant square divided into four quarters, one for each “I”; markers

- Begin by describing each of the operational levels of oppression: ideological, interpersonal, institutionalized, and internalized
- Using one of the four sheets of paper, invite the group to collectively fill out the boxes for homophobia, taking time to identify specific ways in which it plays out across all four levels

- Next assign participants to one of three smaller groups, and give each a sheet of paper. Ask each group to discuss and record how racism operates on each of the four levels, assigning one of the following areas of focus to each group (note: for this part of the exercise, internalized privilege should be substituted for internalized oppression):
 - In social work education
 - In queer spaces (social events, dating, friend groups, chosen family, etc)
 - At work
- Invite each group to share their notes with the larger group, and invite discussion. Add any additional ideas to each group's paper based on the discussion

Making a Commitment to Anti-Racism: How Do We Move the Work Forward?

Materials: Paper and writing utensils for each participant; post-its; Large paper positioned where all can see

- Now that people have identified how racism operates, invite participants to consider how they can work to actively combat it at each level. Give each participant ample time to reflect and record their ideas for themselves on their own sheet of paper. You may share the following questions to help guide participants' reflections:
 - How can we continue interrogating this for ourselves?
 - How can we explore these concepts with co-workers and peers? With our supervisors? With our white clients?
 - How might liberation-based practices call on us to structure our work differently or re-envision our role as therapists?
 - What roles might we consider for ourselves beyond the workplace?
- Next, have participants write at least three specific commitments on three separate post-it notes. One by one, have each speak them aloud to the group and post each on the large sheet of paper for all to see
- Once everyone is done, pose the question to the group: what structures can we build among this group to hold ourselves accountable?
- Close the session by inviting each member to reiterate their commitments and reflect on how they're feeling coming out of the workshop