

Asian Identity Development and Race Based Traumatic Stress



February 21, 2022

Webinar session is funded by Dr. Sukhee Kim's Faculty Project Grant 2021-2022, Associate Professor, in the School of Social Work at Northern Kentucky University

Session Overview

The speaker is a **second-generation Asian American** who has had to navigate different racial identities and communities during the ongoing Anti-Asian Hate Crimes that have been on the rise since 2020. But how Sam was prepared to respond to and interpret these events started to take shape in his childhood and continued into his present-day adulthood. Through stage and constructionist theory models, we will explore how exposure to racial trauma furthered Sam's ongoing process of identity development and created a resurgence of racial identity that provided a boon for his resiliency.

Speaker

Samuel Lenzi (he/him) is a Licensed Professional Counselor who is Asian, Gay, and bicultural. Samuel's clinical interests include Queer Issues, BIPOC Issues, Eating Disorders, Trauma, and other mood disorders. Samuel believes that each person has a valuable sense of intuition, and that therapy can help one push aside the influences that prevent us from listening to our truest self. When he is not practicing therapy, Samuel sings with the Young Professional Choral Collective, enjoys putting together a charcuterie board, and still makes regular time to play Pokémon.





eLearning to Advance Racial and Ethnic Diversity Friendly University Initiative

Faculty Funded Program 2021-2022

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SAMUEL LENZI, MA, LICENSED PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL COUNSELOR



Constructivist view of self

Knowledge exists in historical and cultural context

Knowledge of self is sustained and informed by social processes

Influences I can recall from childhood: animosity for my perceived whiteness, reinforcement of “Asian Excellence” and Model Minority stereotypes, seeing ‘Hapa’ people just like me as their own distinct group of people, low emphasis on Italian heritage, high exposure to Korean cultural values (hard work, diligence, saving face, filial piety, silent suffering)

Jean Kim's Asian American Identity Development Model

Ethnic Awareness- occurs around ages 3-4, family members serve as the model ethnic group, positive or neutral attitudes toward one's own ethnic origin are formed depending on the amount of ethnic exposure conveyed by caretakers

White Identification- typically occurs when children enter school or other environments that convey racial prejudice which negatively impacts their self-esteem and identity. The impact of being "othered" leads to self-blame and a desire to escape their own racial heritage by identifying with White society

What does Assimilation and “White Identification” look like?

Upholding model-minority myths and not understanding how hurtful they can be

Internalizing a philosophy of color-blind racism

Consciously or unconsciously upholding views of anti-black racism

Feeling neutral or negative towards one's own ethnic/racial community

Lack of cultural knowledge, language, customs

Adopting an individualist framework and moving away from a collectivist framework

Atlanta Spa Shootings. March 16th, 2021

“He was pretty much fed up and kind of at the end of his rope. **Yesterday was a really bad day for him and this is what he did,**” Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office Capt. Jay Baker said Wednesday. He was describing the 21-year-old man [Robert Aaron Long] accused of killing eight people, mostly Asian and almost all women, in a rampage across three Atlanta-area spas. Then — as the violence stirred fears in an Asian American community that already felt under attack — Internet sleuths and journalists found Baker’s Facebook posts promoting shirts that called the novel coronavirus an “IMPORTED VIRUS FROM CHY-NA.”

- - Washington Post, “***Captain who said spa shootings suspect had ‘bad day’ no longer a spokesman on case, official says.***”

Atlanta Spa Shootings. March 16th, 2021

In a letter shared Thursday afternoon, Sheriff Frank Reynolds did not address the “CHY-NA” shirt posts but acknowledged that Baker’s comments had “become the subject of much debate and anger.” “In as much as his words were taken or construed as insensitive or inappropriate, they were not intended to disrespect any of the victims, the gravity of this tragedy, or express empathy or respect for the suspect,” Reynolds wrote. Baker had a “difficult task before him” in the wake of the shootings — “one of the hardest in his twenty-eight years in law enforcement,” Reynolds added, praising the captain’s work and saying he had “personal ties to the Asian community.”

- - Washington Post, “*Captain who said spa shootings suspect had ‘bad day’ no longer a spokesman on case, official says.*”

Mental Health America: Resources and Tools for Race-Based Traumatic Stress

Racial trauma, or race-based traumatic stress (RBTS), refers to the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias and ethnic discrimination, racism, and hate crimes. Any individual that has experienced an emotionally painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter is at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury. In the U.S., Black, Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) are most vulnerable due to living under a system of white supremacy.

Experiences of race-based discrimination can have detrimental psychological impacts on individuals and their wider communities. In some individuals, prolonged incidents of racism can lead to symptoms like those experienced with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This can look like depression, anger, recurring thoughts of the event, physical reactions (e.g. headaches, chest pains, insomnia), hypervigilance, low-self-esteem, and mentally distancing from the traumatic events. Some or all of these symptoms may be present in someone with RBTS and symptoms can look different across different cultural groups. It is important to note that unlike PTSD, RBTS is not considered a mental health disorder. RBTS is a mental injury that can occur as the result of living within a racist system or experiencing events of racism.

My reactions and how I coped

I expressed how I felt on social media about violent policing, racial trauma, and white supremacy culture, and I was not ready for the backlash that I received. Negative and invalidating responses were maybe 1/5th of the engagement my post received, but those words cut like knives.

Although my friends were largely supportive of me expressing how hurt and angry I felt, their support provided only minimal relief. I think the impact of their support was mediated by the pandemic, as well as their whiteness.

The few Asian friends and colleagues I had were too depleted to do much other than commiserate, which was needed but didn't feel restorative.

When it comes to resistance and activism around racial violence, most of my role models are Black, with a steadily growing number of Asian voices.

One of the most healing and restorative experiences I had following this event was a Healing Circle for Asian therapists, which allowed me to effectively process how I felt and receive much needed support from people who could accurately empathize with me.

Jean Kim's Asian American Identity Development Model

Awakening to Social Political Consciousness adoption of a new perspective, often correlated with increased political awareness. The primary result is an abandoning of identification with White society and a consequent understanding of oppression and oppressed groups

Redirection- a reconnection or renewed connection with one's Asian American heritage and culture. This is often followed by a realization of White oppression as the culprit for the negative experiences of youth. Anger against White racism may become a defining theme with increases of Asian American self and group pride.

Janet Helm's stage model of "Racial/Cultural Identity Development"

Integrative Awareness- Has developed a secure, confident sense of racial/cultural identity; becomes multicultural; maintains pride in racial identity and cultural heritage; commits to supporting and appreciating all oppressed and diverse groups; tends to recognize racism as a societal illness by which all can be victimized.

Racial/Cultural Identity Development

Conformity: Has a positive attitude toward and preference for dominant cultural values; places considerable value on characteristics that represent dominant cultural groups; may devalue or hold negative views of own race or other racial/ethnic groups.

Dissonance and Appreciating: Begins to question identity; recognizes conflicting messages and observations that challenge beliefs/stereotypes of own cultural groups and value of mainstream cultural groups; develops growing sense of one's own cultural heritage and the existence of racism; moves away from seeing dominant cultural groups as all good.

Resistance and Immersion: Embraces and holds a positive attitude toward and preference for his or her own race and cultural heritage; rejects dominant values of society and culture; focuses on eliminating oppression within own racial/cultural group; likely to possess considerable feelings—including distrust and anger—toward dominant cultural groups and anything that may represent them; places considerable value on characteristics that represent one's own cultural groups without question; develops a growing appreciation for others from racially and culturally diverse groups.

Introspection: Begins to question the psychological cost of projecting strong feelings toward dominant cultural groups; desires to refocus more energy on personal identity while respecting own cultural groups; realigns perspective to note that not all aspects of dominant cultural groups—one's own racial/cultural group or other diverse groups—are good or bad; may struggle with and experience conflicts of loyalty as perspective broadens.

Integrative Awareness: Has developed a secure, confident sense of racial/cultural identity; becomes multicultural; maintains pride in racial identity and cultural heritage; commits to supporting and appreciating all oppressed and diverse groups; tends to recognize racism as a societal illness by which all can be victimized.

White Racial Identity Development

Naiveté: Had an early childhood developmental phase of curiosity or minimal awareness of race; may or may not receive overt or covert messages about other racial/cultural groups; possesses an ethnocentric view of culture.

Conformity: Has minimal awareness of self as a racial person; believes strongly in the universality of values and norms; perceives White American cultural groups as more highly developed; may justify disparity of treatment; may be unaware of beliefs that reflect this.

Dissonance: Experiences an opportunity to examine own prejudices and biases; moves toward the realization that dominant society oppresses racially and culturally diverse groups; may feel shame, anger, and depression about the perpetuation of racism by White American cultural groups; and may begin to question previously held beliefs or refortify prior views.

Resistance and Immersion: Increases awareness of one's own racism and how racism is projected in society (e.g., media and language); likely feels angry about messages concerning other racial and cultural groups and guilty for being part of an oppressive system; may counteract feelings by assuming a paternalistic role (knowing what is best for clients without their involvement) or overidentifying with another racial/cultural group.

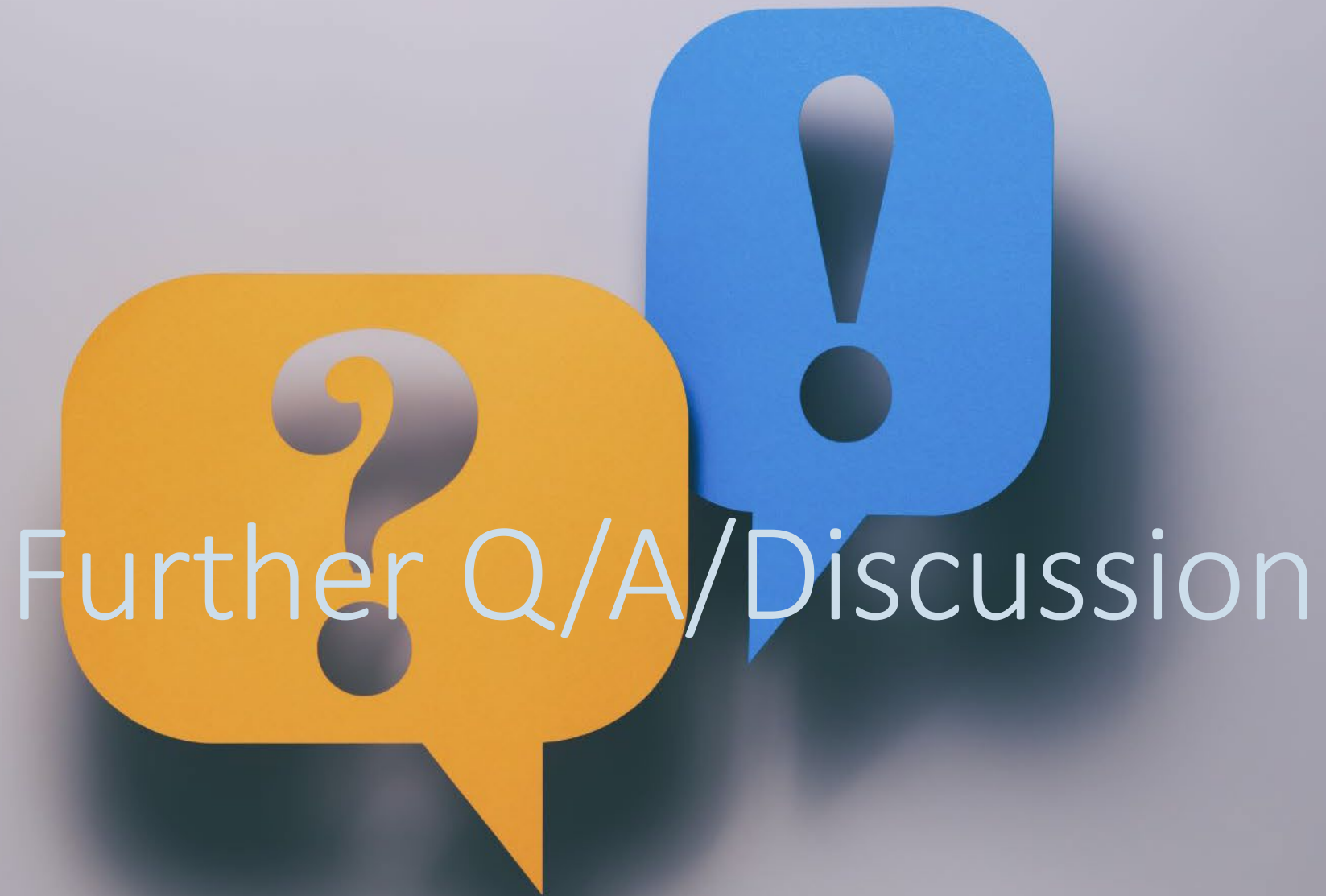
Introspection: Begins to redefine what it means to be a White American and to be a racial and cultural being; recognizes the inability to fully understand the experience of others from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds; may feel disconnected from the White American group.

Integrative Awareness: Appreciates racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity; is aware of and understands self as a racial and cultural being; is aware of sociopolitical influences of racism; internalizes a nonracist identity.

Commitment to Antiracist Action: Commits to social action to eliminate oppression and disparity (e.g., voicing objection to racist jokes, taking steps to eradicate racism in institutions and public policies); likely to be pressured to suppress efforts and conform rather than build alliances with people of color.

Discussion, Q&A, Wrap Up

- If you could impart a narrative to your students of color about who they are, and who they are becoming, what would that be?
- Where would it be important for students and educators to see new and different narratives about people? (The classroom, career field, student orgs, campus leadership, etc.)
- What do our white colleagues and counterparts have to gain from seeing these new narratives about diverse people?
- What can we do to support students at each stage of their respective identity development?
- How is awareness of diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism, visible to those who participate in our respective spaces?
- Where do we succeed and struggle with supporting our students who are not a part of the majority culture?



Further Q/A/Discussion



Thank you for your participation!
For more initiative information, please click [here](#).

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Suk-hee Kim at kims16@nku.edu

