

# **Microaggression as an Ethical Issue in Clinical Practice**

## **Program Description**

Microaggressions have been defined as brief everyday exchanges, often unintentional and automatic, that send negative messages to individuals because of their group membership (e.g., due to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability). The term microaggression can be useful in understanding barriers to a well-intentioned clinician's ability to engage therapeutically with clients across a spectrum of differences. Throughout the various codes of ethics, there is a universal mandate to provide culturally sensitive care to clients. Yet, when microaggressions are unknowingly committed by the helping professional, communication suffers and credibility is lost with the client, which impedes the therapeutic process and may lead to early termination of services. Clinicians are therefore ethically compelled to enhance their understanding of microaggressions and work to minimize their occurrence when interacting with clients. Clinicians engage with a cross-section of society and therefore have a particular need to understand what microaggressions are, how they impact clients, and how they themselves have experienced or perpetrated microaggressions. NOTE: This program may be counted towards ethics requirements for license renewal.

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Develop an understanding of microaggressions across a spectrum of differences (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation).
2. Explore sections of major clinical codes of ethics relevant to the importance of understanding and attending to microaggressions.
3. Identify the benefits of becoming more attentive to microaggressions occurring in the therapeutic setting.
4. Explore possible strategies for creating a greater awareness of microaggression as clinicians and possible responses when the clinician has engaged in a microaggression.

## **Program Agenda**

1:00-2:30	Defining and understanding microaggressions across a spectrum of difference alliance [90 minutes]
2:30-3:30	Identifying benefits of becoming more attentive to microaggressions [60 minutes]
3:30-4:00	Exploring connections to codes of ethics and ethical practice [30 minutes]
4:00-5:00	Exploring strategies for becoming more aware of microaggression and possible responses [60 minutes]

## **Target Audience**

Clinicians, case managers, social workers, counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, advocates, health and human service practitioners.

## **Contact Hours**

4.0 hours (can be modified for a 2- or 3-hour version)

## **Faculty**

**M. Theresa Palmer, LCSW, LMFT, AAMFT Approved Supervisor**, is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, and an Approved Supervisor by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. She is currently a Clinical Associate Professor and Coordinator for Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's School of Social Work in the Winston-Salem Program. She also provides clinical supervision to associate-licensed clinicians, consultation to fully licensed therapists, and supervision-of-supervision to individuals seeking to become Approved Supervisors with the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy. In teaching as well as providing therapy and supervision, Theresa uses a systems-oriented, strengths-based perspective. She also has experienced the transformative power of attending to issues of privilege and power in these settings, particularly in the course she teaches for the School of Social Work on Confronting Oppression and Institutional Discrimination.