Chapter 1
Deconstructing Racial Stigma in the Therapeutic Relationship

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ABSTRACT
This chapter seeks to deconstruct racial stigma of mental illness held by counselors within the therapeutic relationship. The authors will provide counselors with practical tools that will help them work through their own prejudices, discriminations, and stereotypes about people of color and mental illness. This chapter will provide background information on stigma, specifically racial stigma, the process for incorporating theoretical variation in clinical work, and its importance. Additionally, the authors will explore best practices that will help counselors obtain the knowledge and skills needed to effectively work with a variety of clients who are racially and ethnically diverse.

INTRODUCTION
Unfortunately, stigma is not a new concept. In 1963, Erving Goffman’s book Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity took a look at the stigma of character traits. The stigma of character traits as outlined by Goffman (1963) are the “blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering, or unnatural

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passions” possessing “treacherous and rigid beliefs”, and favor “dishonesty”. These characteristics are “being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior” (p.2). The stigma of mental illness is historically wide spread. Stigma for individuals struggling with mental illness robs them of what is perceived as a “quality life: good job, safe housing, satisfactory health care, and affiliation with a diverse group of people” (Corrigan and Watson, 2002, p. 16). Stigma related to mental illness exists in the workplace, in homes and within families, in the education systems and, most surprisingly, in the practice of therapy. Two types of stigma are prevalent in the literature, public stigma and self-stigma. Public stigma “is the reaction that the general population has to people with mental illness” (Corrigan & Watson, 2002, p. 16). Public stigma includes discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices. Racial stigma emerged in the literature and will be explored to better understand its impact on clients of color in the therapeutic relationship within the United States.

Howarth (2006) references Goffman’s view of stigma as being seen as a way to reduce the whole person to a “tainted, discounted one” (p.442). Racial stigma emerged as spotlighting what happens when stigma is applied to minority groups of people. Racial stigma is recognized in a variety of settings including the media, education and in the field of medicine. The authors suggest that racial stigma is also present in the therapeutic counseling relationship. Racial stigma “reduces the identity and the potential of those seen as raced; they are spoiled or blemished by the racist gaze” (Howarth, 2006, p.442). Howarth (2006) suggests that, “racial others” are individuals with skin that is brown and black who are seen as “less than, different from, unequal to the realizing, normatively white other” (p.442). Howarth (2006) also suggests that “race produces and sustains inequalities and is anchored in histories of prejudice, exclusion and poverty” (p.442). Howarth (2006) further explains that race, as stigma must be understood in order for it to be deconstructed. The authors suggest processing this understanding in order to help counselors become more aware and educated when working with individuals who are different; individuals who are also perceived as being so different that they are not considered normal. Additionally, race as stigma highlights how race reduces one’s identity and potential. Howarth (2006) speaks to the fact that race is institutionalized and has historical implications. It is important to understand the impact and legacy negatively associated with race.

Education and awareness are critical to helping counselors engage whole-heartedly and authentically with clients who identify racially and ethnically different from the counselor. It is the intent of this chapter to provide practical ways to help counselors acknowledge and work through their own personal prejudices, discriminatory views and stereotypical behaviors related to racial and ethnic minorities with mental illness. The terms counselor and clinician will be used interchangeably as the terms differ
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