Northwest (HHS Region 10)

MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
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Truth, Trauma and Equity-Informed Solutions
Highlights & Key Concepts

Presenter: Ashley Stewart, MSW, PhD, LSW, Race-Equity Subject Matter Expert, Trainer & Curriculum Development Specialist at C4 Innovations

Summary Ideas:

Systemic Racism
➢ Racism shows up and persists in most—if not all—of our systems.
➢ Race is socially constructed. There is no biological basis for race. Race does play a significant role in our lives, but it is understood differently in different cultures and settings.
➢ Racism causes trauma for people of color and for white and white-adjacent folks.
➢ Both traumatic events and day-to-day ongoing chronic racial stressors can lead to race-based traumatic stress.

Incorporating Understanding of Truth and Trauma into Culture Shifts
➢ Equity cannot be treated as an additive. Equity must be integrated into the culture. Change fatigue is very real. Beware of stagnation in equity initiatives to ensure the work keeps going. This is everyone's work.
➢ Assess resistance to change. Change is often difficult and can create tension. Be mindful of where resistance is and be strategic about addressing it.
➢ Be mindful of yourself. Committing to being yourself is not only good for you; it also creates a ripple effect welcoming others to express their true identities.

Questions & Responses:

Q1 *I appreciate that you started with the word "truth." Can you share what truth means in this context of discussing trauma and equity-informed solutions?*

A1 I've been training about trauma and talking about trauma-informed practices for a while. Something that I found to be critically important to the work was to also get to the to the truth of it. A lot of times, we will talk about trauma as it relates to different forms of identity. There are a lot of truths that people are navigating each and every day of their lives, truths that are passed down generation to generation, realities that we might be diminishing within our daily societal practices that are absolutely relevant and important to people as they think about trauma, as they think about reducing the trauma and being able to create more equitable spaces, is to get to that truth and to acknowledge those realities that people are living with. A big part of how I approach trauma-informed practices is to acknowledge what people are experiencing, to stop trying to navigate around it, and to acknowledge the systemic structural truths that people deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Q2 *The term "trauma-informed" has been around for a minute, but it's so crucial to infuse in all of our work at all levels—how do you see this term and these approaches evolving in our field?*

A2 When I initially started to do this work, the term "trauma-informed" would only come up in the context of behavioral health or mental health and now, folks are starting to see the influence of that and acknowledging and honoring the fact that trauma is beyond the incident but is also the way that it exists in people's bodies, in the way that it's experienced by individuals. By narrowing in and really seeing the consequences of trauma in how people are showing up, how people are participating day-to-day has been a shift that I've noticed in the field. People are understanding that the way you supervise needs to be thoughtful and mindful of the way that people are experiencing trauma—the the way that you engage with someone, the way that you introduce yourself—there are so many different parts of people's lived experience that are tied to some aspect of their life, that could be activating or encouraging people that we're not tapping into or considering. Talking about trauma more openly provides opportunities to recognize the importance of showing up and being mindful and thoughtful of our own actions and how they might influence other people.

Q3 *You do so much equity work training individuals, organizations, and systems, as well as your academic experience. What is the most common request for training or consultation you receive? As an equity specialist, do you actually see something else when these requests come in? Meaning, what are people actually suffering with and/or truly needing to hear from you in your work with them?*

A3 The response has actually been changing a lot lately. I think that the nature of the types of requests that we're getting today—very different than five years ago—are certainly shifting. One of the things that I think when folks are initially asking for training is that they're asking for strategies to do equity; they're looking for example for a five-step plan that's going to help equity exist within a space without the acknowledgement of the whole-person, whole-culture, whole-system change. That's also part of it. Some of the things that I'm getting now—which I'm excited about in terms of the conversation—is that critical "what's next" question. A lot of places have made meaningful investments in doing training. They've learned about what institutional biases are. They've learned the different types of oppression. They've been doing training on some of the general contexts and terms around equity and authenticity. I mean, we've talked about it from so many different angles, and people feel empowered or they feel engaged, maybe they feel disrupted by these conversations, and then they are wondering, okay, well, what do I do with that now? The different types of conversations we're having include: what does the ripple effect of the advocacy look like? What does culture change look like? How do you begin to shift the conversation around change fatigue to make sustainable, authentic, concrete changes within an organization that lead to longstanding equity? I think people are more ready to make those shifts and then there are also folks who think that they're ready to have those conversations, but really have skipped some of those foundational understanding of inequities to begin with. It's really about being able to and being willing to do a thorough assessment as needed to see what the health of the organization is, in terms of its

preparedness, to talk about trauma, to talk about trauma-informed practices, and to talk about equity.

Q4 *Is White guilt necessary in order for this to work?*

A4 Is creating space for people to process their guilt necessary for the work? Absolutely. Those spaces need to be created. Guilt does not serve the function of creating systemic and structural change. Is the guilt necessary for the work? No, I don't think so. But I think places for people to process that guilt, to move beyond it, to get to the actual change and the healing that needs to happen to stop perpetuating the harm is absolutely necessary.

Q5 *Could acculturative stress also include what Native or indigenous people have experienced?*

A5 Absolutely—the forced assimilation experienced by native and indigenous folks, and the trauma that is associated with that—there's some aspect of acculturative stress that highlights that if someone does not adjust or navigate or find ways to code-switch into the dominant culture, that they will not have success in that culture. We think about native and indigenous folk, literally being physically forced. There's a lot of trauma there that we must acknowledge. This is why I started this with truth. Because these are folks' truth, these are the truths of some of the folks in this room, and I want to honor and acknowledge that generational poverty, the truth around that. What about the stress of maintaining your culture? What does it look like to try to hold on and to preserve your culture? That is stressful. I remind folks that while we typically think of trauma as an event, it is also the compounding of having to do that every single day of your life that is dramatically stressful. When we think about it in context, or we think about it in the work, we really have to lean into that too.

Q6 *Knowing the problem, how do we as Black people stop passing trauma down generation to generation? How do we move forward?*

A6 Yes, I appreciate this question. I had a really dynamic conversation about this in the session that I had right before this, so I want to honor that conversation as I talk about this. I think one of the things that's important to acknowledge is that this person describes "we" as Black people, right? So, they identify as a Black person; they are a Black person. There is appropriate adaptation that occurs in that passing down of generational trauma. When we talk about race-based traumatic stress and historical trauma, a lot of times that shows up as intended protective mechanisms. "Don't do this. Don't behave in this particular way. Be quiet" - those rigid parenting, cultural norms. "Be alert; be aware" —all of these things that people have to navigate and do, as they occupy space as a person of color, or as a Black

person in society has been passed on from generation to generation, exacerbating those feelings of trauma and stress and hypervigilance. However, it is appropriate adaptation, which is a term that was popularized by Dr. Joy Degruy, who talks about the ways that that has been historically a way to protect our children, to say that I know the realities of society, and that if you don't behave in the space, or if you draw too much attention to yourself, you could be putting yourself at risk and at harm. I think that sometimes it's easier to just put the parameters around safety instead of having the really difficult conversations about why, what that looks like and how it's not fair, and how to navigate situations safely, and doing that healing process and that work. So, I wonder if we are framing it as trauma passed from generation to generation as opposed to describing it as healing from generation to generation being able to acknowledge why we are creating the safety mechanisms for our families.

Q7	*Do you see improving a sense of belonging as the right focus for organizations that want to increase their employees' or clients' emotional safety and reduce traumatic stress?*

A7	I do see a sense of belonging as an important part of it. Also, at the root of sense of belonging is the actual belongingness. What does that mean that needs to happen in the culture for people to actually feel or be a valued part of the community? When people feel emotionally safe, they're able to be part of it, they're able to navigate the space without having to constantly adjust or hide parts of themselves in the work, they are freed up to be innovative, and creative, and aspirational in the work that they're doing because they are expending less energy hiding themselves or adapting themselves to fit into the culture. The culture would thereby need to shift first for that belongingness to be authentic, and for people to experience emotional safety and reduced traumatic stress. I think that that's a really great example of an interpersonal process that an organization can commit to - to increase belongingness. But it must also simultaneously work on structural and organizational change. We do a lot of that work with people all the time. It's really dynamic.

Resources:

- [Truth, Trauma and Equity-Informed Solutions webinar recording](#)
- [Racial Equity and Cultural Diversity – a collection of resources curated by the MHTTC Network](#)

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