



Pathways to Healing: Trauma-Informed Counselling for Newcomers

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Theme: Investing in Canada's Shared Future: Pathways to Possibilities

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Africentric Land Acknowledgment

As people of African descent living on Treaty 6 Territory, we acknowledge that we live, learn, play, and work on the traditional lands of the Nêhiyawak (Cree), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), Dene, and Nakota Sioux peoples, and the homeland of Métis Nation, Region 4.

We recognize that we are all Treaty people — those whose ancestors are Indigenous to this land, those who came here as settlers, and those, like our African ancestors, who were brought here through the violence of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

We honour the strength and resilience of both Indigenous and Black communities who continue to shape this land with courage, creativity, and resistance. We carry deep gratitude for their teachings as we work toward equity, truth, and healing together.

Overview

- This presentation aims to centre the resilience, wellness, and coping strategies of newcomers to Canada amidst societal challenges.
- Drawing on research and reflexive exercises, we will address effective ways to facilitate the healing, hope, and resilience of newcomers.
- A safe(r) and brave space will be created for attendees to participate in interactive learning where they will increase their ability to identify and understand the impacts of **xenoracism (definition to be provided later)**.
 - A moment, a breath, a beat to 'arrive'.
 - A moment to **connect with your intention** for being at this conference and this presentation.
 - A moment to **acknowledge** that there may be similarities in our journeys here today, and an invitation to **make space** for the differences in our journeys.

Interactive Exercise

1. What draws you to the topic of "Pathways to Healing: Trauma-Informed Counselling for Newcomers"?
1. What are you hoping to get from this interactive session?

Relevant Background

Newcomers: Individuals who have arrived from another country within the past 1-10 years, encompassing diverse populations and communities (Government of Canada, 2025; Saroli, 2022).

Growth: Fastest growing segment of the Canadian market, but poorly served due to being poorly understood (Government of Canada, 2025).

Recent Data: Over **817,000 newcomers** in Canada welcomed in the first four months of 2025, when tallying up permanent and non-permanent streams (Dzsurdzsa, 2025).

Examples: Refugees, international students, skilled workers, family members reuniting with loved ones, individuals seeking a better quality of life (Government of Canada, 2025).

Why it Matters: Understanding newcomers' needs can improve service delivery, integration and community relationships, ultimately benefiting Canada's growth and diversity.

When New Homelands Are Not Welcoming

- Encounters with other forms of interpersonal and structural violence, primarily **racism** and **xenophobia**

Xenoracism: A racism that is not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced, the dispossessed and the uprooted, who are beating at western Europe's doors, the Europe that helped to displace them in the first place. It is a racism, that is, that cannot be colour-coded, directed as it is at poor whites as well, and is therefore passed off as xenophobia, a 'natural' fear of strangers. But in the way it denigrates and reifies people before segregating and/or expelling them, it is a xenophobia that bears all the marks of the old racism. It is racism in substance, but 'xeno' in form. It is a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white. It is xeno-racism. (Sivanandan, cited in Fente 2001, pp. 23-24)

- In Canada, racialized groups, including immigrants, experience significantly more discrimination and unfair treatment compared to non-racialized groups (51% vs. 27%; Statistics Canada, 2024).
- Individuals experiencing discrimination are twice as likely to report lower levels of perceived mental health, life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, and a sense of belonging to the community (Statistics Canada, 2024).

Understanding Racial Trauma and PTSD

- **Limitation of Current PTSD Framework:** The current PTSD framework in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (**DSM-5-TR**) **may not fully capture the impact of racial trauma.**
- **Accumulation of Stressors:** Ongoing **stressors** like racism, discrimination, microaggressions, and intergenerational trauma can **contribute to mental health issues**, including PTSD.

Understanding Racial Trauma and PTSD cont.

- **Intergenerational Trauma:** Trauma can be passed down through generations, affecting individuals in complex ways (**i.e., epigenetics**).
- **Importance of Clinical Judgement:** When working with Black Canadians, clinical judgement is crucial to provide effective support and address unique experiences. (Dixon et al, 2022; Kubala, 2022; Olson, n.d.)

What Are Microaggressions

Definition:

Microaggressions are **subtle, everyday comments or behaviours that communicate prejudice or bias** toward marginalized groups (Sue & Spanierman, 2020).

They are often **unintentional** but still cause **emotional, psychological, and relational harm**.

- An African American psychiatrist and Professor at Harvard University Chester Middlebrook Pierce coined and defined the term microaggression as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are “put-downs” (Pierce et al., 1978, p.66)

Understanding Microaggressions

For some newcomers they might not initially recognize microaggressions because:

- They may come from societies where **race is not the main identity marker**.
- Canada's racism often appears “**polite,**” **indirect,** and **subtle** — hidden in tone, curiosity, or compliments.
- Early experiences may feel confusing: “*Was that racism or am I being too sensitive?*”
- Power dynamics (e.g., being new, reliant on employers or institutions) make it difficult to question or name these experiences.

Why Microaggressions are Impactful

For some newcomers, they come from places where:

- Race was **not** the primary social identity.
- Their professional or social status was respected.
- They expected fairness and opportunity in Canada.

So when microaggressions happen, they may feel:

- Shocked or confused (“Did that really happen?”)
- Disoriented about identity (“Who am I here?”)
- Silenced due to politeness norms or fear of being labelled “angry” or “ungrateful”

Over time, this leads to **racial trauma**, **acculturative stress**, and **emotional exhaustion**

Common Microaggressions Experienced by Newcomers

Assumptions of Inferiority or Foreignness

- “Your English is so good!”
- “Where are you *really* from?”
- Speaking slowly or loudly to them.
- Assuming they don’t understand how things work in Canada.

Professional or Intellectual Dismissal

- Overlooking foreign credentials.
- Saying: “You don’t have *Canadian experience*.”
- Assuming lack of skill or leadership capacity.

Common Microaggressions Experienced by Newcomers cont.

Stereotyping and Exoticizing

- Treating cultural dress, food, or accent as “weird” or “exotic.”
- Making comments like “You people are so hardworking!” or “You must love spicy food.”
- Touching hair or asking invasive questions about culture or religion.

Tokenism or Cultural Curiosity Fatigue

- Asking one person to represent their entire culture.
- Turning cultural holidays into performative “diversity” moments without addressing equity.

Coping, Surviving, Resilience, and Healing

- Recognition that people have many different ways of coping.
- Sometimes we cannot say/ do anything in the moment - it's not safe.
- Not judging the ways people cope - it's the best they can do at the time.
- Coping and surviving: Fight/ Flight/ Fawn 'please & appease'/ Freeze
- Being in community can be Nourishing (from 'My grandmother's hands', Menakem, 2017):
dance/ movement, cooking together, clapping, drumming, shaking, gardening

Interactive Questions:

1. What coping mechanisms/ tools do you see newcomers use?
2. What are some examples of coping in your communities?
3. How have YOU coped in the face of microaggressions, bias, racism/ xenoracism, intergenerational trauma?

Resilience

“Resiliency is the ability to withstand trauma and turmoil and be able to proceed with living and engaging in a productive life.” (Renee Linklater, 2020, p. 25)

Just like our ability to heal, resilience is part of our human nature. It is as much a part of us as our ability to heal. The positive effects of resilience can ripple and change not only individuals, but families, communities, and neighbourhoods (Menakem, 2017).

Resilience extends from the individual to the collective and from surviving to thriving. Resilience can be understood at the individual, family, community and nation-level.

Cultivating Wellness With Newcomers

- **Integrity:** As a way of being – something **connected to one's values** and priorities and that informs all of life's decisions.
- **Resistance:** Opposing aspects of society that don't align with their values or wellbeing – joining efforts to end racism or **adopting a lifestyle that allows more time for relaxation.**
 - **Workaholism** is a **western value** that many newcomers are actively fighting against.
 - Recognize that some systems are developed to create oppression and that often the **oppression** they create is **invisible** to both the **oppressed** and the **oppressors.**

Cultivating Wellness With Newcomers cont.

•**Community Connection:** Shift narrative from *Me, Myself and I* to “*We, Us, Ours!*” Orient idea of self-care to: ***How do we take care of ourselves & Others?***

•**Boundary Management:** Newcomers often expected to go beyond white peers – “**diversity tax**”

- Teach newcomers how to **articulate their needs** and wants while simultaneously **honouring their rights and preferences**.
- Set **compassionate boundaries** – “lean in and lean out” when needed.

•**Cultural Fit:** Embracing **cultural traditions and realities**; taking part in **cultural healing circles**, enjoying cultural dances, gardening, reclaiming old family recipes; help newcomers to **embrace their cultural identity**.

Cultivating Wellness With Newcomers cont.

- **Creative Expression, Balance, and Joy:** Creative expression is a good way to **recharge battery** that might run down from issues involving racism.

- **Creativity through art** can help newcomers to de-stress, problem solve and manage their negativity; tackle internalized messages about being a newcomer;

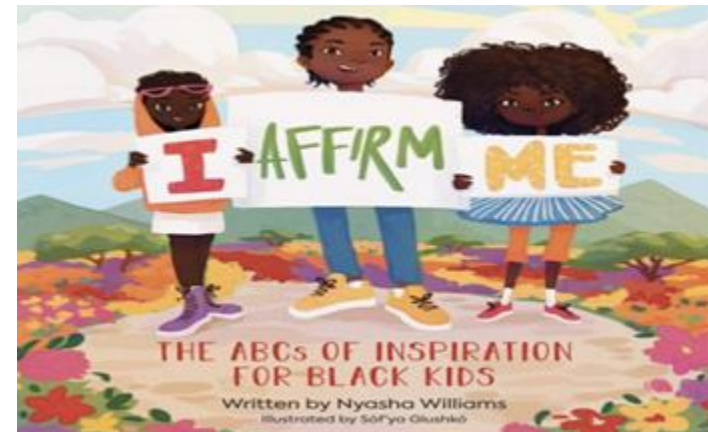
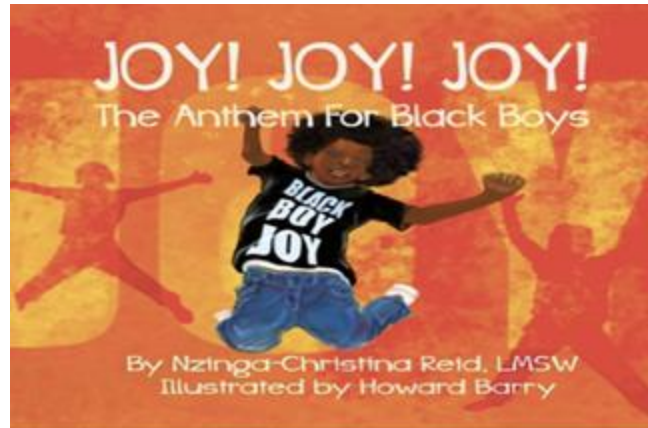
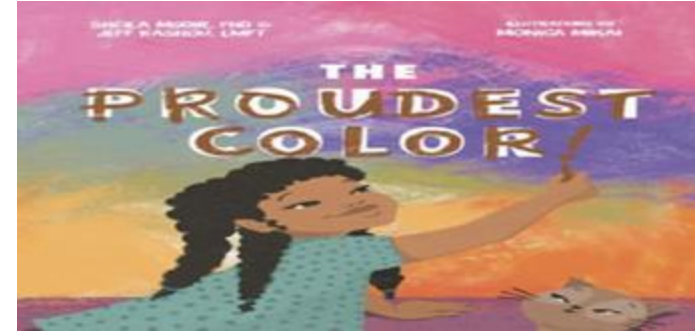
- **Embracing joy** allows for **generational healing** and a mechanism for wellness among newcomers.

Use **gentle inquiry**, **normalize confusion**, and provide language to articulate newcomers' experience. – *“How did that comment land for you?”*

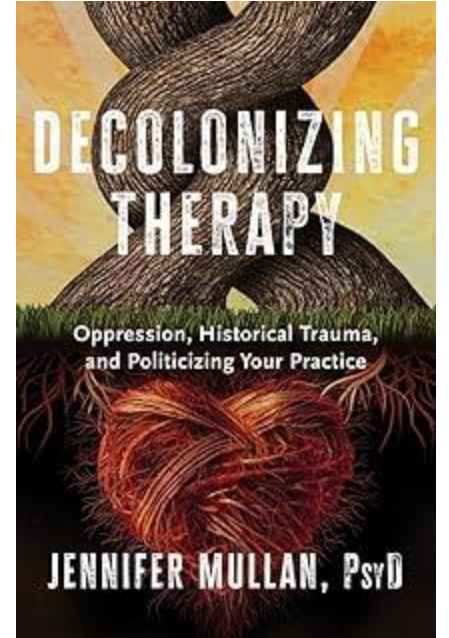
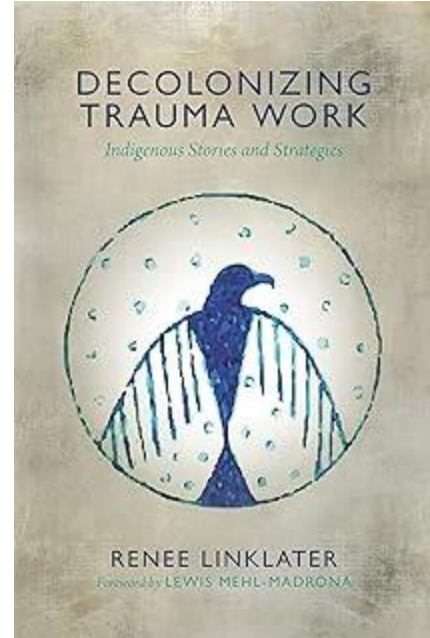
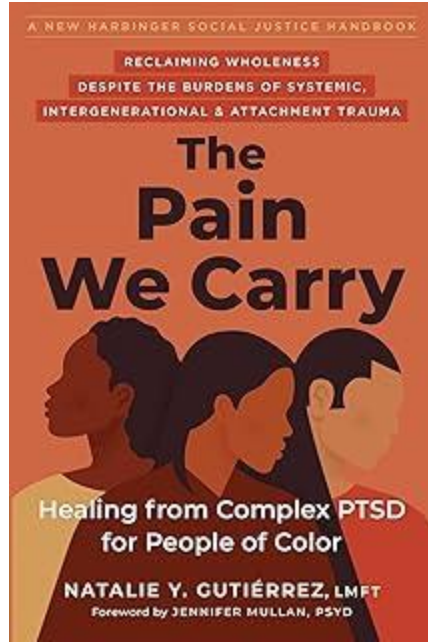
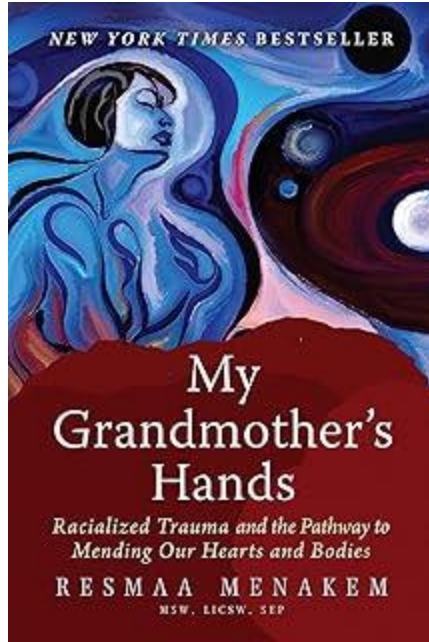
Reinforce agency: impact is what matters, not intent; integrate education through resources on racism in Canada.

Implications: Beyond Survival and Resilience - Thriving

- Thriving involves reinvention and growth.
- Invited Allyship
- Cultural humility
- Non-performative activism
- Awareness of settler colonization
- Dismantling xenoracism



Resources continued...



Wrap Up

***Thank You for attending,
for your presence, and for
sharing!***

Any Questions?!?

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