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INTRODUCTION

Special Issue on Cultural Responsiveness in Threat Assessment

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In preparation for this introduction, the authors looked at research on cultural competence and implicit bias within the threat assessment process. Only a few articles were found, with the focus on threat assessment in primary and secondary schools (e.g., O'Malley et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2022). The dearth of information in this area creates difficulties in evaluating the impact of bias in the threat assessment process, as well as how cultural responsiveness can be of assistance. The articles within this special section are meant to be the beginning of a larger conversation within the *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management* and the field as a whole.

What Is Cultural Responsiveness?

Recently, many workplaces and industries have seen a proliferation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) departments, training, and hiring of experts. Threat assessment and security professionals and firms simultaneously began to promote DEI and cultural awareness in their public-facing communications. However, this special section is the first known effort of this journal to consider and address cultural responsiveness in the proliferation of relevant research in this area. Although similar topics are being discussed in parallel disciplines, such as forensic psychology, there continues to be a significant lack of scholarship and discussion on how to integrate cultural responsiveness into practice (Bergkamp, McIntyre, & Hauser, 2023). Psychologists providing forensic services are prone to minimize the impact of their own self-assessed biases on their work relative to their peers. For example, Neal and Brodsky (2016) found that forensic evaluators tend to believe other colleagues carry significant bias, whereas they rate themselves as having few difficulties navigating these problems.

Although many have heard the term cultural competence, there have been recent shifts in language to highlight the importance of individual growth processes for understanding differences in identity. Specifically, *cultural humility* refers to the continuous process of building self-awareness about our own identities and our social positions in the world (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). A commitment to challenging our biases while developing and maintaining awareness of how power and privilege are conferred in our society is known as *cultural responsiveness* (APA, 2019). These terminology shifts are important, as they highlight the active engagement and lifelong endeavor to consider how culture shapes our attitudes, evaluations, and behavior. Without this willingness for consistent introspection about how we have been shaped by the pervasive ideas in our culture, we are unlikely to make meaningful change at the individual or group level (APA, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2020; FitzGerald et al., 2019).

Identity Is Not a Unitary Construct

Identity is a complex concept that includes aspects such as race, sexual orientation, gender

Editor's Note. This is an introduction to the special issue "Cultural Responsiveness in Threat Assessment." Please see the Table of Contents here: http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/tam/10/2/.—TDB

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identity, ability, ethnicity, and age (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Scholars have discussed how different aspects of identity confer increased power and privilege over marginalized groups, which can have an impact on our interpretation of behavior (Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2020). This is particularly important in the practice of threat assessment because of the unsupported, yet prevailing, contention that the observation and interpretation of behavior is a culturally neutral practice. This assumption is challenged by research that highlights how an assessor's interpretation of behavior will be inherently influenced by their implicit cultural norms. Implicit bias research indicates that being unaware of our own bias or classifying oneself as unbiased increases the likelihood of engaging in micro- or macroaggressions toward marginalized groups (Neville et al., 2013; Tettegah & Neville, 2016). In a systematic review of interventions designed to reduce implicit prejudices and implicit stereotypes in real-world contexts, FitzGerald et al. (2019) found limited support for the effectiveness of certain interventions for challenging implicit bias, instead urging a focus on systemic change in conjunction with individual actions.

Threat Assessment and Cultural Responsiveness: An Unexplored Area

Literature has recommended that threat assessment cases be examined by a multidisciplinary team including education, law enforcement, and human resource professionals. As such, team members have varying degrees of training and knowledge, and each team member brings their biases to the interaction. Given that individuals may rate themselves as objective after using biased strategies (Hansen et al., 2014) and evaluators who correctly identify bias can believe ineffective strategies will mediate the effects (Zapf et al., 2018), it is important to understand how these personal biases may increase at the group level, affecting the quality of the decisions (Akhmad et al., 2020). Although clinical psychology programs are required to teach cultural responsiveness, inconsistencies are present in the depth and level of this type of training (Green et al., 2009; Gregus et al., 2020). For many of the other fields that are part of the threat assessment process, it is unclear how consistently issues of cultural responsiveness and humility are considered as critical parts of the training process.

Recent research in threat assessment and management (TAM) suggests that demographic variables, such as race or disability status, may impact the frequency of referrals and severity determination in threat assessment (Crepeau-Hobson & Leech, 2022). Research has also indicated that colorblind analysis, or emphasizing similarities in a way that denies differences in race, has been shown to increase the likelihood of prejudicial and biased attitudes affecting decision-making processes (Neville et al., 2013; Tettegah & Neville, 2016). In the related field of violence risk assessment, there are indications that the assessment process may be impacted by unacknowledged bias (Venner et al., 2021). This emerging research is contributing to increased knowledge and understanding of the intersections between TAM and cultural responsiveness. Simultaneously, the prevalent contention that TAM is behaviorally oriented, and therefore resistant to bias, has prevented further exploration of these ideas. The unfortunate outcome is a limiting of the production of research that could help us better determine where and how implicit bias may be entering the assessment process.

The Current Issue

Scholarly analysis of cultural awareness has appeared only once in this journal. The published article was an analysis of a case in which a lawsuit was brought against the Canadian government for racial discrimination (Hart, 2016). Despite growing awareness of the impact of cultural variables on the interpretation of human behavior, TAM literature has yet to investigate these factors in a substantive way relative to parallel disciplines. For example, an analysis of change in cultural competence considerations by year of publication suggests that more recently published threat assessment literature has generally not integrated concurrent advancements in concepts of cultural competence (O'Malley et al., 2019). These two examples highlight the need for more research that bolsters our understanding of how cultural factors affect threat assessment.

Furthermore, cultural homogeneity in groups can affect objectivity, decision making, and analysis of data (Antonio et al., 2004; Apfelbaum et al., 2014; Mok & Morris, 2010). Representational gaps within TAM teams and among professional leadership can

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contribute to cultural homogeneity and potentially produce additional barriers to culturally responsive practice. For example, although the demographic variables for the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals are not publicly available, individuals with diverse or minoritized identities appear to be underrepresented among TAM professionals relative to the diversity of the individuals they assess. While this is not an adverse finding in and of itself, it is reasonable to infer that the combination of cultural homogeneity among TAM professionals and the lack of research on cultural bias affecting threat assessment inhibits culturally responsive TAM in practice. The consequences of this can include biased referrals, inappropriate assessment methods, micro- and macroaggressive interactions with minoritized individuals, management planning issues, inaccurate predictions of risk, exacerbated conflict, and overlooked opportunities to resolve situations at the least intrusive level. This issue was conceived as a builder of momentum within TAM research, with the end goal of meeting the efforts of other fields to be inclusive of cultural considerations.

In the first article of this special section, Bergkamp, Hauser, & Wachsmuth, (2023) present their findings from a literature review on factors related to implicit bias, challenging the notion that TAM can be truly objective. They then propose a method for increasing self-awareness of social locations and offer recommendations for improving cultural responsiveness in TAM training and practice. In the special section's second article, Hogan and Corabian (2022) present the findings of their study investigating possible bias in violence risk predictions. They outline conceptual and empirical foundations for the potential association between race and violence risk findings when structured professional judgment approaches are used. Their findings suggest that racial disparities are not limited to actuarial risk tools but can be observed among structured professional judgment-based risk assessments. They also suggest that the patterns of risk factors identified among different ancestral groups may differ in subtle ways. Finally, Lampe et al. (2023) investigate cultural factors in risk assessment and recommendations for tailored treatment to prevent recidivism among a multicultural sample of incarcerated youth. Their findings underscore the importance of using a multimethod approach in risk assessment and cultural sensitivity when interpreting information.

Future Directions and Conclusions

The effort to detect and mitigate acts of targeted violence has received increased public attention, particularly in the aftermath of mass shootings. Many school districts and some states have mandated threat assessment programs in place (i.e., RCW 28A.320.123, 2019). Security professionals have recognized the need to include a multidisciplinary threat management team as part of their workplace violence program (American Society for Industrial Security International, 2020). As the establishment of threat assessment teams is promoted to increase the safety of numerous environments, it is critical that training includes a robust coverage of how intrinsic bias and lack of cultural responsiveness can threaten the veracity and integrity of various kinds of threat assessments; otherwise, we are at considerable risk for misidentifying or mishandling threats because of a lack of a fully integrated perspective that necessitates culturally responsive thinking and action.

We, as threat assessment experts, must acknowledge and work to challenge our unconscious biases as we advance both individually and collectively through this process. Procedures and training materials for TAM professionals must be evaluated and updated for the recognition and inclusion of cultural bias. We advocate including material on cultural responsiveness in future conversations, training, team compositions, processes, and peer-reviewed articles to improve threat assessment in practice and research. We cannot increase our knowledge without exploration, and the certainty of our conclusions must be verified by research. We hope that this special section is the beginning of a fruitful and open discussion about cultural responsiveness and humility in TAM.

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