MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING, & THE 2020 ELECTION

Jennifer Whitney, PhD
Randy Patterson, PhD
Counseling Center

Randy Patterson, Ph.D.
Jennifer M Whitney, Ph.D.
Present information and data on national and community impact of divisive political landscape

Provide opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences in this divisive political landscape

Identify methods to help create an intentional community in the service of mental health and well-being in this divisive landscape

Provide opportunity for participants to discuss their hopes for the 2020 election cycle and for the future—Not who wins but **who we are, who can we be as a community**
Crisis Management
Yearly Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th># of CM Cases</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>140</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>154</td>
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<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>184</td>
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- 2015-2016 to 2016-2017: 115%
- 2016-2017 to 2017-2018: 10%
- 2017-2018 to 2018-2019: 19%
Stress Levels of Americans

57% of respondents said they were stressed by the current political climate

63% said that the future of the nation was a cause of stress for them

60% said they thought that the country was at its lowest point in history
A SHARED VIEW ACROSS GENERATIONS

No matter their age, more than half of Americans believe this is the lowest point in our nation's history that they can remember.

- **Ages 72+**
  - **OLDER ADULTS**
  - **56%**
  - Lived through: Pearl Harbor, World War II

- **Ages 53–71**
  - **BABY BOOMERS**
  - **57%**
  - Lived through: Vietnam War, JFK and MLK assassinations

- **Ages 39–52**
  - **GEN XERS**
  - **61%**
  - Lived through: Gulf War, Oklahoma City bombing

- **Ages 18–38**
  - **MILLENIALS**
  - **59%**
  - Lived through: September 11, High-profile mass shootings
A Racial Stress Divide

> Hispanic adults experienced an average stress level of 5.2

> Black adults’ stress level increased from 4.7 to 5.0

= White adults stress level remained the same (4.7)

Lying awake at night:

- Hispanic adults = 56%
- Black adults = 43%
- White & Asian adults = 42%
A Racial Stress Divide

- **Hate crimes** as a source of stress:
  - 27% of White adults say that hate crimes cause them stress when thinking about our nation
  - 37% of Hispanic adults say that hate crimes cause them stress when thinking about our nation
  - 38% of Native American adults say that hate crimes cause them stress when thinking about our nation
  - 41% of Black adults say that hate crimes cause them stress when thinking about our nation
  - 34% of Asian adults say that hate crimes cause them stress when thinking about our nation
The Costs Of Politics

- 40% of respondents said that politics was a cause of stress in their lives.

- 20% reported losing sleep, feeling fatigued or being depressed owing to politics.

- 10% - 30% said that politics took an emotional toll on them:
  - anger, frustration, hate or guilt, or caused them to make comments they later regretted

- 20% reported politics had damaged their friendships

- 16% reported that “politics has made my home life less pleasant.”
The Big Sort

In 1976, 25% of Americans lived in places where the presidential election was a landslide

In 2016: 80% of U.S. counties gave either Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton a landslide victory.
The Big Sort

Majorities of both parties express “very unfavorable” views of the other party (first time in over 2 decades). Among Republicans this is up from 32% in 2008 to 58% in 2016

55% of Democrats endorse feeling “afraid” of Republican party

49% of Republicans endorsed being “afraid” of Democratic party

Rates increased more among the most politically involved of both parties

A majority of Democrats polled considered Republicans ‘closed minded,’

A majority of Republicans considered Democrats ‘closed minded.’ Qualities of dishonesty and immorality were assigned to Republicans by Democrats, while laziness, and immorality were assigned to Democrats by Republicans.

In short, politics became more personal.
White Supremacist Propaganda

- White supremacist groups amplified their propaganda campaigns on campuses in 2019,
- Targeting 433 colleges and doubling their efforts from the previous year
- Of the 2,713 White supremacist propaganda incidents in 2019, as many as 630 took place on college campuses – nearly double the 320 tallied in 2018.
- In 2019, the various form of propaganda averaged more than seven incidents per day.
  - Anti-Defamation League
Is social media to blame?

Democrats and Republicans who used Twitter several times a week were assigned to a condition in which they followed a twitter bot with opposing opinions for one month. Republicans became significantly MORE conservative. Dems showed slight increases in liberal attitudes.

(Bail, Argyle, Brown et al., 2018)

Another study also found that those social media users randomized to receive varied news sources rather than just those echoing their views were more likely to express “radical policy views” than those filtering news through sources reflecting their own views.

Jo, Donghee, “Better the Devil You Know: Selective Exposure Alleviates Polarization in an Online Field Experiment,” working paper, March 2020
46% of staff agreed that UNCG effectively responds to incidents of discrimination.

41% of staff agree that UNCG effectively responds to incidents of bias.

50% of staff agree that they trust UNCG to meaningfully address issues of inequity.
What contributes to healing, well-being?

• "Going into any kind of situation expecting to win or to convince somebody of your point of view is unlikely to result in a non-stressful approach"

• If you think a discussion will be too "emotionally laden," -- it may not be worth it.

• Recommends that people make sure to get enough sleep and eat well to help their bodies be more resilient to the effects of stress.

• Emphasizes the importance of reducing your exposure to stressful inputs and make time for things that help you unwind.

• Suggests taking breaks from the news, or "choosing to only watch the news, read news, engage in discussions about news up until a certain point in the evening."

• Encourages reserving enough time for things that de-stress you
  • "whether it's taking a walk in the woods, or spending time with friends playing a card game, or just enjoying one another's company."
Each of us needs to withdraw from the cares which will not withdraw from us. We need hours of aimless wandering or spates of time sitting on park benches, observing the mysterious world of ants and the canopy of treetops.
“I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.”

- Brene Brown
Constructive Conversations

How do you define constructive conversations?

Kim & Del Prado

• “An exchange in which the people involved speak about their personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on matters of culture and diversity, and listen to the other person with genuine openness.”
• “an understanding of and willingness for reciprocity--I will talk and I will also listen.”
• “This involves...an openness to deeply connect and ideally be mutually impacted.”
• Are served by “staying engaged and not getting hijacked by our feelings or others’ reactions”
Step 1: Identify a Grounded Goal

**Grounding:** Pause before diving in. Notice your reactions. Develop mindful awareness—the ability to slow down and be present. Use grounding strategies (breathing, centering, concentrating, and focusing).

**What is your goal** in learning how to have constructive conversations about culture and diversity? What specific outcome are you seeking?

With whom do you wish to speak, about what?

Examples:
- *I want to stand up for myself.*
- *I want to stand up for a marginalized group.*
- *I want to support someone I care about.*
Step 2: Locate and Acknowledge Barriers

What are your “internal barriers” constructive conversation?

- Thoughts, behaviors, feelings that intrude on our conversation goal
  i.e. negative self-statements, perfectionism, avoidance, procrastination

- Fear—of conflict, loss of control, “saying it wrong,” of rejection, of vulnerability

- Anger, hopelessness, discomfort with the unknown, fatigue

- Defensiveness—”the enemy of good listening,” noticing it, seeing how it makes us less present
What are relevant “external barriers?”

- Social norms: having conversations that involve conflict may feel like a violation of family or social norms

- Privilege/advantage: important to have awareness of power dynamics, how people with different social/cultural/gender identities may experience the conversation differently

- Time: difficult to carve out time for thoughtful, in-depth conversations
Step 3: Setting a Value-Driven Intention

Identify values that are central and guiding to you

- Examples: compassion, dignity, generosity, justice, love, humility, integrity

Core values can anchor when strong emotions are present; Values can help us to navigate those internal barriers

Consider courage:

“Courage is the most important of all virtues...without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently.” Maya Angelou

“Fear is a reaction. Courage is a decision.” Winston Churchill
Step 4: Set the Stage

- How to open the conversation
  - “I” statements
- Reflect core values; be authentic
- Invite the other person in
- Consider your non-verbals
  - Tone of voice, volume, pace
- Keep open body language, facing the person
- Notice the other’s body language
- Timing
  - Is this a good time, am I in the right space, am I tired/hungry/angry?
  - how is the other person, what do I know is on their plate?
  - Is there adequate time for this conversation?
Step 5: Take Action

3 critical ingredients

1. Why this person?
   Clearly express why you are broaching this topic with this person, highlight your connection

2. My experience
   What about your particular experience are you wanting to share?
   This can feel the most sensitive, anxiety provoking, vulnerable

3. The Ask
   What are you asking of, seeking from the other person?
   Communicate what you are hoping to achieve
   Invite the other person to mutually engage
   Consider compassion, generosity
Step 6: Listen
Step 6: Listen

- Give full, undivided attention, maintain open body language, non-verbal encouragers
- Minimize distractions
- Don’t interrupt or respond before they are finished; table rebuttals
- Notice & normalize your defensiveness
- Listen accurately—notice & remember their words
- Listen for the intention—what are they trying to say, what is the emotion behind it
- Stay grounded in your goals (repair? heal?)
- & anchored in your values (Dignity? Courage? Hope?)
Step 7: Respond

Before responding, get grounded by using whatever grounding strategy works for you—breathe in and out mindfully, notice your physical surroundings, notice your sensations

**Anchor** in your core values

**Notice** impulses to respond impulsively, defensively, reflexively rather than thoughtfully

**Appreciate** the speaker—remember that they did not prepare for this, see if you can find something to appreciate in them—their presence, honesty, willingness, conviction, time etc

**Acknowledge** what was said—aim to accurately reflect back to them their intention, what they actually said, any accompanying emotions.

**Invite** corrections

**Share the impact** of what the other said; ask yourself to express not just the initial impact but the deeper, more full impact. Allow vulnerability. Highlight connection if it is relevant.
STEP 8: DO IT AGAIN
References & Resources

- It’s Time to Talk (and Listen) by Anastasia Kim and Alicia Del Prado, New Harbinger, 2019