

Definitions

Clinician Fragility: Taken from the concept of white fragility (Saad, 2020), clinician fragility refers to the violence that often accompanies wounded and defensive responses to those voicing systemic harm. Clinician fragility not only shuts down voices that criticize the mental health system (MHS) because clinicians hear them as a personal critique or threat, but also further justifies the very systemic practices being criticized. Clinician fragility also refers to the inability to hear or engage with feedback about their role in the MHS.

Example: In response to comments about how social work can be and has been oppressive, a clinician says, “Well the school I went to really focused on social justice and I try to be really careful about when I use crisis and the police to respond to my clients with mental illness.”

Co-optation: Co-optation refers to the process by which a dominant group immobilizes oppositional forces by subsuming members and/or ideas of the opposition into the decision-making process without allowing for any actual change. When a social justice movement becomes mainstream and institutionalized, it becomes vulnerable to co-option. A social justice movement becomes co-opted when it is swept up into becoming a part of or extension of the larger group or system(s) that it initially sought to dismantle and transform. (Feldman, 2018)

Example: Job titles within traditional mental health programs such as “peer support specialist” and “peer mentor,” wherein employees with psychiatric histories work in paraprofessional roles providing clinical, ancillary, and/or paraprofessional services that are indistinguishable from those provided by non-peer staff (without the pay equity with actual clinical staff). (Penney, 2018)

Co-Reflection: “A process of Intentional Peer Support (IPS) used to help each other reflect on our practices (how we’re doing what we say we want to be doing). It is about us creating expertise together through a process of learn, practice, reflection. It is designed to model the peer support relationship so that we are practicing the principles at all levels of our relationships.” (IPS: An Alternative Approach, 2014.)

Informal Coercion: Coercive practices exercised within the regulations of the given mental health legislation is usually referred to as formal coercion, while practices that infringe upon clients’ voluntary and autonomous decisions but that fall outside regulations are referred to as informal coercion, e.g. persuasion, interpersonal leverage, inducement (offers), and threats.

Example: A clinician suggests that services or support will be withdrawn if the patient does not comply with treatment; the clinician may also mention that the use of involuntary hospitalization will be considered. (Valenti, et al., 2015)

Pathologization: The practice of viewing or characterizing something as medically or psychologically abnormal, i.e. as a symptom indicative of a disease or “mental illness.”

Example: A clinician diagnoses every client who self-harms with “borderline personality disorder.”

Peer Support: A values-driven approach that promotes alternative perspectives, advocates for human rights and dignity, and focuses on building genuine, mutual relationships that enrich the lives of those involved. (HCRS Peer Support Services Brochure)

Sanism: A form of systemic and systematic discrimination and oppression of people who have been diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, or who have or are perceived to have mental differences or

emotional distress. Sanism can look like: discrimination in employment and housing, conflating “mental illness” with violence, involuntary holds on locked psych units, forced-drugging, restraint and seclusion, coercion into psychiatric treatment, police violence, being targets of violence due to fear and hatred. *Examples:* 50% of victims of police shootings are disabled. The majority of those victims have psychiatric diagnoses. People diagnosed with psychiatric disorders are 12 times more likely to be the victims of assault than the general population. (Vermont Psychiatric Survivors, Inc., 2018)

Tokenism: Symbolic inclusive gestures or “tokens” given to members of a minority group with the intention of creating the appearance of equity that result in presence without genuine inclusion and decision-making power.

Example: Hiring peer support workers without giving them the resources, training, or support they need to practice peer support.