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Developing Self-Awareness in Counseling Professionals

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Developing Self-Awareness in Counseling Professionals

La Green

A Capstone Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education at

Winona State University

Spring 2019

Winona State University

College of Education

Counselor Education Department

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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CAPSTONE PROJECT

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Developing Self-Awareness in Counseling Professionals

This is to certify that the Capstone Project of

La Green

Has been approved by the faculty advisor and the CE 695 – Capstone Project

Course Instructor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science Degree in

Counselor Education

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Abstract

This paper identifies the importance of multicultural competency in counselors; (2) defines culture and self-identity to include subculture, constellation of privilege and/or the intersectionality of marginalization that occurs in every person; (3) identifies worldview as culturally defined and influenced, not a single issue; (4) acknowledges the importance for internship experience as a monitored hands-on experience for CITs to gain practice and supervision; (5) encourages counselors to identify their intersections to increase their awareness of intersectionality in a similar investigative practice and supervision environment; (6) succinctly summarizes and categorizes select identity models for developing multicultural competencies in counseling professionals; (7) identifies the need to shift competency model inward to develop self-competency and awareness; (8) Brief introduction of possible results of applying a self-awareness model adapted from cultural competent frameworks to CITs.

Keywords: counselor self-awareness, multicultural competence

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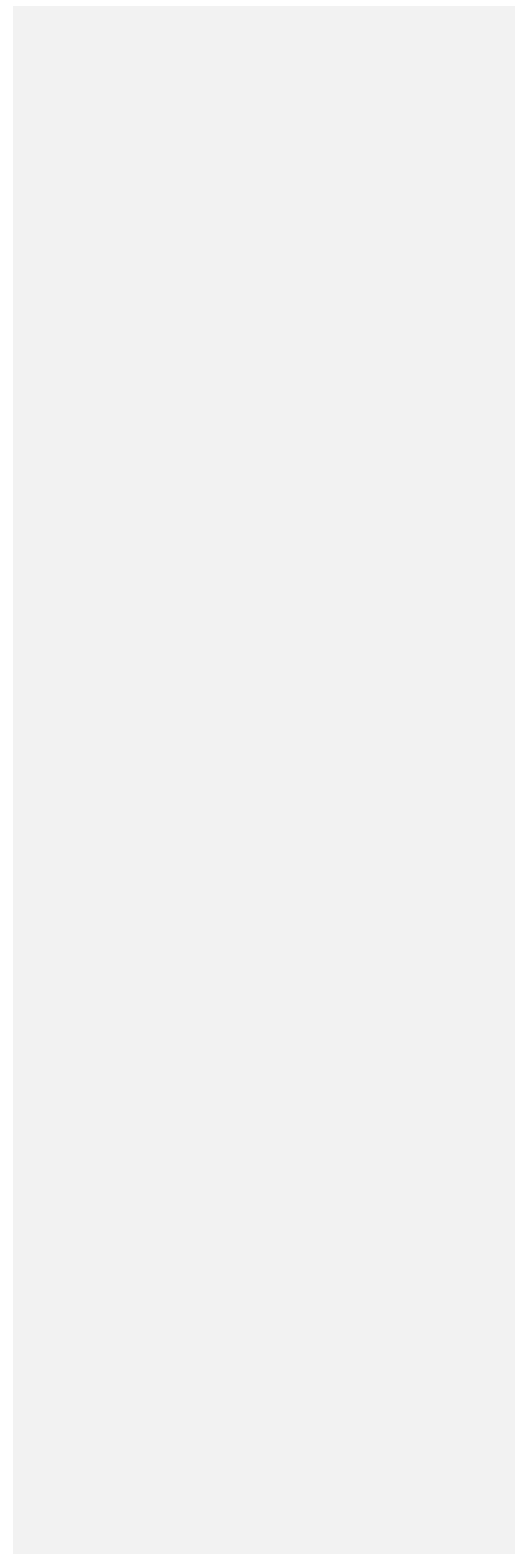
Introduction

The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2009) standards indicate that counselors are to promote an "understanding of self and culturally diverse clients" (p. 10). Multicultural counseling acknowledges complex diversity and explores the relationship of culturally different persons to one another. This approach requires the counselor to develop an awareness of their cultural identity as well as the cultural identity of others (Pedersen, 1991) (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996) (Cook, Lusk, Miller, Dodier, Salazar, 2012).

Research has identified the "what" in the equation of what counselors need to do to effectively create alliances with their diverse clients. There is a significant body of research about attempts to answer the "how", these models mainly focus on increasing the knowledge of the counselor about cultures that exists including identifiable patterns and needs of cultural groups (Ridley, Mendoza, Kanitz, Angermeier, & Zenk, 1994; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013).

Obtaining generalizable knowledge about diverse client populations was a natural starting point to address the effects of historical counseling approaches which implemented a traditional medical model for diagnosis and treatment. Using a medical model, the counselor demonstrates a position of power to identify and treat the client's presenting concerns. In this approach counselors take information that they learned from western training and apply it to diverse populations with similar presenting concerns. The lack of knowledge of needs of diverse people groups encouraged a cookie cutter approach that does not fit the needs of the clients. This is referred to as colonizing counseling. The term colonizing acknowledges power dynamics that

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exist between counseling professionals and clients and insinuates a presumptuous and

dominating invasion of space. Identifying a need for different approaches with diverse groups

shifted away from colonizing with western ideas to a collaborative approach that may best fit the

client (Conwill, 2015; Goodwill, Williams, Chung, Tallyrand, Douglas, McMahon & Bemak,

2015).

Multicultural competencies have only been around for the last four decades and have

much room for expansive development. CACREP introduces the idea with in its multicultural

competency standards that the counselor should develop awareness of their own culture. The

counselor and client each have cultural identities which inform their worldview. When the

counselor discovers worldviews the client holds that are incongruent with the counselor's, the

counselor must effectively broach and explore these differences to develop an effective

therapeutic alliance. A multiculturally competent and self-aware counselor labors to understand

the history of themselves and how current and historical events have affected cultural groups that

are separate from the counselor. Counselors must develop awareness of their own attitudes and

beliefs as they counsel clients from diverse backgrounds (Harding, 2007).

This awareness may be accomplished with the application of existing multicultural

competency models for self-discovery. This paper will begin to briefly review some existing

models, identify parallels and initiate discussion about how to create a new exhaustive model

that addresses the counselor awareness of personal culture and worldview. Increasing awareness

of the diversity of layers that exist within the counselor may be realized through applying several

cultural competency models.

Review of Literature

Definition of Diversity and Culture

Diversity can include racial identity, ethnic identity, age, gender, political affiliation, apparent and inapparent disabilities, sexual orientation, relationship structures, religious and spiritual beliefs or lack of belief, socioeconomic status and history of socioeconomic status, location, language / dialects, familial privileges and disadvantages, access to technology, and access to education amongst family generations (Hays, 1996). Minorities often can be categorized into multiple marginalized cultures and subcultures. Feelings of sameness manifested within these identified groups and subgroups are due to shared experiences (Ibrahim, 1991; Pitagora, 2016).

Culture emerges when experiences are shared. An individual's culture is correlated with diverse experiences and informs their decision making. Counselors in training must learn about similarities and differences of clients. Understanding this relationship will facilitate understanding of personal cultural standards as a baseline for recognition of biases (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996; Cook, et.al, 2012).

Multicultural Competency Development

The development of Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) include (a) counselors' awareness of their own cultural values and biases; (b) their awareness of the client's worldview, and (c) initiation of culturally appropriate intervention. These dimensions are interlinked with three major components: (a) attitudes and beliefs, (b) knowledge, and (c) skills (Sue et al., 1992).

The goal of a self-aware counselor is to acknowledge the rich dimensions within every individual, starting with themselves. This self-awareness is the baseline for developing accurate multicultural awareness by grappling with the reality that humans are diverse, have diverse experiences, and make choices based on those experiences. Counselors in training (CITs) should be able to identify and acknowledge the importance of diversity and embark on a therapeutic discovery of unique traits and experiences of their future clients. This willingness to discover is increased with the CITs introspective understanding of how their worldview influences the way they respond to the world (Richardson & Molinaro, 1996; Cook, et al, 2012). Schemata organize incoming information into meaningful knowledge constructions that help people make sense of their environments and that build expectations and formulate predictions that aid in survival, adaptation, and growth (Ridley et al., 1994)

Understanding one's personal diversity involves developing personal acceptance, personal understanding and self-respect. Counselors must understand their own comfort level with the uniqueness of others as well as their own privilege and limitations. CITs should develop an understanding of how their cultural background, experiences, attitudes, values, and biases influence the therapeutic process as they interact with diverse clients (Ridley et al., 1994; Pitagora, 2016).

Counselor educators must facilitate learning that helps students to lean into feelings of nervousness when working with individuals who present differently than the counselor. With the appropriate support, the developing counselor can work to address their fears related to their biases and inexperience, develop through practice the ability to intentionally broach difficult

subjects, seek supervision, and commit to an ongoing process of making the best out of every opportunity for growth and exploration (Archambault, 2015).

Developing cultural understanding through introspection includes overcoming personal privileges, prejudices and biases. However, counselor educators must be diligent to note that as CITs are developing self-awareness, they may be facing the concept of privilege beyond an abstract or theoretical idea for the first time. Although personalizing privilege is likely to cause discomfort for counselors in training, the ability to gain personal insight and reflect is crucial to developing cultural competency (Cook, et.al, 2012).

Controversy with Cultural Competence

The commonly used term "cultural competency" holds the idea that there is a point of complete understanding. This terminology insinuates that the culturally competent has become an expert or has reached a level of passable knowledge to which they can successfully operate as a counselor. Historically, this approach has offered a static categorical understanding of culture so that the counselor could apply specialized techniques to problem solve presenting issues (Furlong & Wright, 2011; Cook, et.al, 2012).

Cultural humility is a term that has recently contended to replace cultural competency. Opponents to using the term competent assert that competency does not encourage the counselor to continue discovery as a humble learner. This humble and lifelong learner stance is conducive to developing accurate empathy and up to date, personalized interventions (Steefel, Foronda, Baptiste, Reinholdt, & Ousman 2016).

Opponents state that the end goal for an effective counselor is not cultural expertise but rather acknowledging culture as the spectrum of its parts. Understanding that clients who belong to specific cultures have inimitable needs and should not be solely treated based on generalizable knowledge. The emphasis of cultural humility brought a needed exploration of the importance of recognizing differences within groups, and lifelong commitment to self-awareness of biases, privilege, identity and power (Kohli, Huber & Faul, 2010; Steefel et al., 2016).

Cultivating Awareness

Self-awareness is the method one uses to witness themselves. It involves the ability to reflect and introspectively evaluate personal biases so that they may be reduced (Foronda et.al, 2016). This professional skill is integral to the foundation of a therapeutic alliance. Furthermore, self-awareness is a way for CITs to identify and manage countertransference (Gelso & Hayes, 2001). Development of self-awareness through experiential learning opportunities is necessary (Evans et al., 2012).

Developing introspection through process interventions is effective (Isom et al., 2015). Each of us belongs to various cultures from which we derive our sense of self. As clients are gaining introspection, their counselors should also be growing introspectively (Hofstede, 1980).

Intersectionality

As counselors in training become self-aware, they should be knowledgeable about themes of intersectionality as it relates to their own identity. Intersectionality emerged via considerations from Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist critique of Feminist Theory. Since then it has been a topic which has been expanded and used amongst researchers across disciplines. It has

been a tool for investigative analysis and as a social movement and a model to map the power differentials of marginalized populations (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectional analysis has been criticized as being divise. However, this approach has practicality beyond documenting differences, identities and experiences. This analysis can be used to investigate how multiple intersections such as race, gender, disability, and sexual minority status relate to the client's available opportunities, disadvantages and experiences. This investigation is said to promote effective advocacy (Roberts & Jesudason, 2013; Pitagora, 2016).

Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays and Tomlinson (2013), review Dorothy Roberts and Sujatha Jesudason's essay "Movement Intersectionality: The Case of Race, Gender, Disability, and Genetic Technologies" which uses intersectionality theory to promote political change by identifying commonalities to form solidarity between groups. Roberts et al., believe that identifying categorical differences while promoting commonalities can improve cohesion between two groups who have diverse ways of thinking.

This interpretation may be useful for a counselor who is developing awareness of self. Acknowledging differences, according to Roberts, may create increased awareness how structures of oppression and the resulting power struggles are connected. This intersectional view can facilitate conversation between separate identity groups allowing perspectives of both privileged and non-privileged to be explored, identifying overlapping experiences of marginalization, discrimination and privilege (Roberts et al., 2013).

Established by Pamela Hays (1996), the "ADDRESSING" model is a framework that enables acknowledgement of various parts which comprise a person's culture including age,

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developmental disabilities, acquired disabilities, religion, ethnicity, sexual

orientation, socioeconomic status, indigenous group membership, nationality, and gender. A

counselor could use this tool to investigate the areas of which their client is a member of a non-

dominant or dominant group and create a constellation of their privilege or intersections of their

marginalization. It is also possible to be used as a self-discovery tool. Conceivably, increasing

awareness of the diversity of layers and intersections that exist within the counselor can be

realized through thorough application of several historical multicultural competency models.

Cultural Competence Development Models Organized by Type and Year

Three-dimensional approaches

Three-dimensional model for counseling racial/ethnic minority clients

Counselors focus on three client dimensions: (a) locus of problem, (b) acculturation level,

and (c) goals of helping. The emphasis for this approach is client healing through processing and

problem solving (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993).

Theory of multicultural counseling and therapy

This approach is comprised of three dimensions of cross-cultural competencies, each

dimension interlaced with the following components: (a) Knowledge (b) Beliefs and attitudes,

and (c) Skills. In the first stage counselors increase skills and develop awareness by gaining

knowledge of their own cultural values and biases. Next, counselors develop knowledge through

gaining awareness of the client's worldview while maintaining openness about how their

worldview is incongruent with the client's worldview. Finally, the counselor develops

knowledge by skillful initiation of culturally appropriate interventions (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996).

<u>Integrative model</u>

This approach focuses on the multi-dimensionality of the self. This model suggests that the individual personality is comprised of influences from micro, macro, and mezzo level (Leong, 1996).

Worldview approaches

<u>Stress-resistant delivery model</u>

This model encourages the investigation of stress factors which influence clients. The purpose is to help the client differentiate stress factors from prejudice and discrimination and develop respect as they gain insight about differences in worldviews between themselves and others (Smith, 1985).

<u>Existential worldview theory</u>

Existential worldview theory seeks to identify generalizable components of culture as well as culture-specific variables while employing an integration of cognitive skills. This grounded theory approach focuses on how understanding the concept of worldview including developing knowledge of client worldviews promotes empathy, increases ethical practice and personalized interventions. This model can facilitate client engagement, increase counselor empathy and knowledge of systems which impact societal roles such as gender (Ibrahim, 1991).

Transcultural perspective

Transcultural perspective includes the idea that the generalizable nature of multicultural counseling is not contrary to understanding variables of each client. This approach encourages the blending of cultural ideas to improve and foster collaborative communication between client and counselor (McFadden, 1996).

Model of change process

In the Model of change process, it is important to consider two phases of understanding worldview. There is a general/abstract worldview, and a specific counselor-client congruence of worldview that is to be achieved (Trevino, 1996).

Process-oriented models

Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

In the Developmental Model for Cultural Sensitivity, Milton J Bennett explains three stages which are ethnocentric: (Denial, Defense, Minimization) and three stages which are ethnorelative: (Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration). In this model Bennett focuses on the increase in the CIT's desire to acknowledge and experience difference. As the CITs desire to experience differences increases, they progress through the stages. This model emphasizes the idea that different cultures create and maintain worldviews using different processes (Bennett, 1986).

 Sexual Minority Model

McCarn and Fassinger's stages begin with the counselor developing an awareness of feeling different, exploration of the difference, deepening the counselor's commitment and

knowledge about the emerging identity, and finally, intentional fusion with and acceptance of the emerging identity (McCarn, Fassinger, 1996).

<u>People of Color Racial Identity Model</u>

People of Color Racial Identity Model was developed as a framework to investigate African American Identity. Cross attempted to highlight the process African Americans come to understand their identity through the following stages. Pre-encounter: adhering to beliefs and values of the dominant culture, diminishing their own culture; (2) Encounter: encounters the impact of racism and is compelled to focus on minority identity; (3) Immersion/emersion: concurrent celebration of own racial identity, history; (4) Internalization: development of secure racial identity; (5) Internalization-commitment: commitment to concerns the minority group faces. (Cross, 1998).

<u>Perceptual Schema Model for Cultural Sensitivity</u>

The Perceptual Schema model highlights the importance of schema theory to enhance cultural sensitivity. Schemata develops based on interactions between individuals and their environments. They guide perception and attention to aspects of the environment that are important to achieving these ends. This model asserts developing cultural sensitivity informs perceptual schemata. Cultural sensitivity is defined as the ability of counselors to acquire, develop, and actively use an accurate cultural perceptual schema in the course of multicultural counseling.

If counselors' unexamined personal agendas block perceptual schemata, they may ignore, distort, or underemphasize incoming cultural information to the detriment of the client. This mishandling of cultural information can occur even after years of training and professional

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practice. The application of a cultural perceptual schema depends greatly on self-analytic counselors, who ferret out private agendas and actively work to eliminate their prejudicial or stereotypic perceptions of culturally different clients (Ridley et al., 1994).

Racial identity development model

The focus of this model is on how people develop racial and ethnic identity while identifying a continuum that leads to developing an anti-racist identity (Helms, 1995).

Multicultural assessment procedure model

This model encourages and directs counselors to take a scientific stance in counseling process when assessing clients' issues. Counselors develop skills to help clients to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy expression of values and beliefs while affirming clients' worldview. The counselor must remain aware of their own biases, experiences and worldviews to correctly demonstrate this model (Ridley, Li, & Hill, 1998).

Banks' model of development of ethnicity

According to this model there are six stages for development of ethnicity: ethnic psychological captivity; (2) ethnic encapsulation; (3); ethnic identity clarification (4); bi-ethnicity; (5) multi-ethnicity and reflective nationalism; (6) global competence (Banks, 2002).

Discussion

A common occurring caveat for the multicultural competency models is that each person is unique and may not experience a linear progression through the stages in each model. Individuals may shift around or cycle back to previous stages, or advance past stages. The models are meant to be used as frameworks to consider. This writer's supposition is to use these

models as a base to turn the focus on the counselor entirely which may support the development of self-awareness.

Atkinson et. al., (1993) suggest the importance of understanding the presenting issue for the client. When altering Atkinson's model to be counselor centered the presenting issue could be adjusted and defined as the counselor's desire to develop self-awareness, and the level of which the counselor is congruent with the dominant culture.

The counselor's own cultural ideas must be explored (McFadden, 1996; Trevino, 1996). Understanding the counselor's own biases can be accomplished by identifying current beliefs and attitudes which inform the counselor's worldview. The researchers suggest that the importance of this understanding is to gain awareness (Sue et al., 1996) including any unhealthy expression of their own values and beliefs (Ridley, et al., 1998).

CITs must consider the multi-dimensionality and intersectionality of an individual in order to remain invested in self-awareness considering the traits of the counselor are comprised of influences from the position of the counselor in the macro, micro and mezzo levels (Leong, 1996). Counselors must be aware in their personal and professional growth of various stress factors that influence their worldview and their practice and how these factors are related to their intersections of disenfranchisement, or power (Smith, 1985; Ridley et al., 1994).

It is important for the counselor to assess their level of openness to experience and investigate differences considering their own intersections (Bennett, 1996; McCarn, Fassinger, 1996) including the intersectionality of CITs who have minority status (Banks 2002). Further suggestion would be to use the following counselor-focused dimensions adapted from Atkinson et al., Three-dimensional Model for Counseling Racial/Ethnic Minority Clients (1993): (a) locus

of discomfort, biases, inexperience, (b) level of counselor's acculturation (c) counselor's goal for helping.

Components of Existential Worldview Theory may help the counselor with cognitive distortions and dissonance which can arise as they experience inner tension related to investigating power, privilege, and marginalization experienced by themselves or historically by their family members. Developing this awareness is important to bridge the gap of understanding the effects of the counselor's worldviews. Increasing the counselor's knowledge of systems increased the counselor's ability to consider other people's experiences (Ibrahim, 1991).

An exhaustive review of multicultural competency and identity development models would expand this conversation and identify any gaps and modifications that could be applied to this investigative and integrative preliminary outline of the possibility of filling a needs gap by adapting an inward counselor-focused lens using the above considerations.

Developing an exhaustive model for CITs to increase self-awareness could have some promising effects including doubling as an instrument to identify counter-transference, and increase the CITs empathy and motivation to learn about other cultures once the CIT has been intentional about immersing themselves in each dimension of their own culture, coming to terms with their own positions of power, privilege and minority status. Furthermore, Counselor Educators would have a way to provide ongoing supervised training opportunities in their educational programs for counselors to increase their self-awareness.

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