

Counselors Experiences with Race and Ethnicity

The Importance of Dialogue

Angela McDonald, PhD, LPCS, NCC
Chair, Department of School Administration and Counseling

Agenda

- Why this topic?
 - What does the research say?
 - Dialogue
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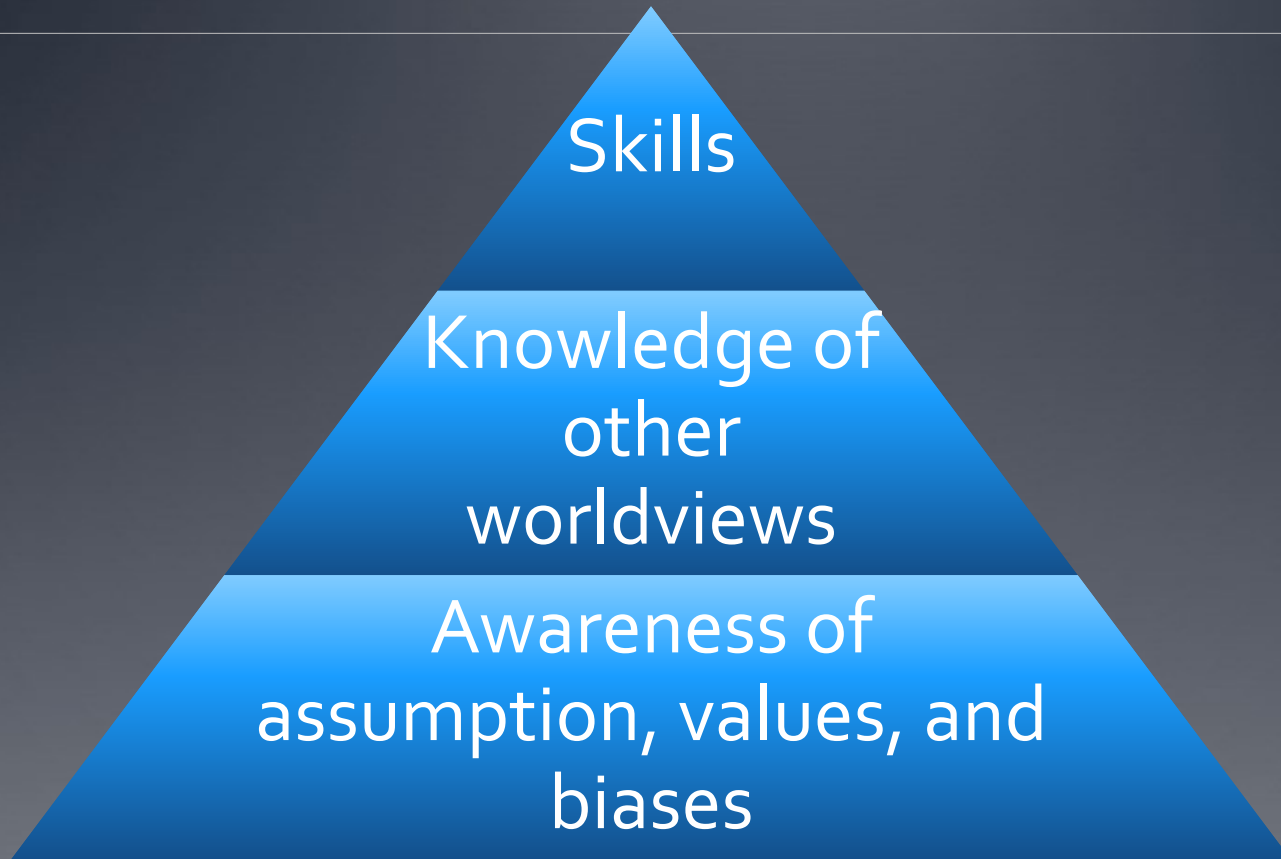
Why This Topic?

- Why are some counselors more successful than others?
 - Owens, J. 2013: The ability to understand and empathize on a cultural level can lead to a better dialogue between clients and therapists. This will enhance the chances for conversations and connections within the therapeutic relationship.
 - What's important to clients?
 - Owen, J., Leach, M.M., Wampold, B., & Radolfa, E. 2011: Counselors should have understanding specific cultural competence regarding the ethnicity of local clients. Cultural processes in counseling are positively correlated with the positive outcome of the therapeutic process.
 - Penn, S.L. & Post, P.B. 2012: When counselors are working with culturally diverse child clients, a lack of awareness and knowledge of cultural issues can cause negative influences on the bond between counselor, families, and child clients.
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Clients of Color

- Racial and ethnic minority clients more likely to:
 - Be misdiagnosed
 - Be assigned to junior-level counseling staff
 - Receive minimal therapeutic contact
 - Be overrepresented in public inpatient facilities
 - Be confined to inpatient treatment longer
 - Terminate from therapy prematurely
 - Rate their counseling experience with dissatisfaction
- Microaggressions are part of our everyday life:
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2PoJsAS4>

Cultural Competence



The Research Study

- Qualitative study of 11 counselors' experiences of multiculturalism in their professional practices
- Participants had to have at least 2 years experience in counseling; all had experience working with clients of color and clients whose racial and ethnic background is different than their own
- All participants from VA, NC, or TN
- Email reflections, in person interviews, phone interviews, and assessment of conceptual level

Barriers to Race-Related Dialogue

- Self: no indicated race/ethnicity, shame from exposure to racist values system in family of origin
- Clients: discomfort, no words, belief that it is unrelated to the presenting problem, dismissed by clients, clients' worldviews
- Coworkers and supervisors: job security, negative atmosphere in workplace, busy supervisors, lack of administrative support, homogenous staff

I think the South has baggage around issues of race. There is still a presumption that everybody from the South has some certain prejudices. Sometimes it takes a little extra effort to get past those with folks. It was upsetting to realize some of the generalizations made about me.

-Robert

Opportunities to Engage in Race-Related Dialogue

- Self: self-reflection, journaling, exploring personal culture through genealogy, travel abroad, reading, entertainment
- Clients: broaching, spirituality, interracial dating, multiracial couples and families, expressions of racism, experiences of racism
- Coworkers and supervisors: diverse staff, encouraging supervisors, TIME!

Styles of Broaching Multicultural Dialogues with Client Families

- *"Opening the door"* – Invitation from the counselor to the clients early in relationship to discuss race and ethnicity. Counselor self discloses something related to their own culture as invitation to clients to do the same.
- *"Tell me about your culture"*- Focused on gathering information about ethnic characteristics of family's culture and values, not necessarily race or experiences of racism.
- *"Only as it relates to the presenting problem"*-Considered necessary to discuss race and ethnicity because either client has broached the topic or it is directly connected to the presenting problems and goals of counseling.
- *"Broaching the X factor"*- Considered necessary to ask if cultural differences between counselor and client are interfering with therapeutic progress, puts responsibility on the clients to decide.
- *"Calling it what it is"*- Direct intervention of therapist to call attention to race dynamics impacting therapeutic relationship. Counselor offers his or her perception to clients.

I'd say my personal experiences with people of other cultures—having close friends or close coworkers—challenged my small town beliefs and helped me work through some of that. Also my spirituality has helped a bit. Growing up in the South, in a very small country town, I do have biases and some things I don't know if I will ever get rid of my whole life no matter how many classes I take. I have to challenge a lot things inside myself.

-Carol

I try to be intentional about race and ethnicity in counseling by examining myself and thinking about how I identify myself—what it means to be male, the privilege I have, and how clients may think about me. Just by virtue of being degreed and credentialed there is a power differential. Power is a huge construct when it comes to empowering clients around race and ethnicity. I think about being Hispanic, Latino, being married, and what it means to wear a wedding ring, my office space, and the feel of it.

-Joseph

Dialogue

1. Do issues of race impact your work with students, clients, and families?
 2. Does race/ethnicity impact your relationships with your immediate supervisor (boss) or colleagues?
 3. Do you have someone to talk to at work about race-related issues that emerge?
 4. How do you broach the subject of race/ethnicity with students or clients?
 5. Have you experienced or observed racial microaggressions in your workplace?
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