Racial Dynamics in Counselor Training: The Racial Identity Social Interaction Model

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Abstract

Counselors frequently receive their initial training about the dynamics of race and culture in the counseling process in didactic group settings, such as multicultural courses and experiential skills-building labs. Whereas multicultural and diversity courses reportedly have been growth promoting for students, counselor educators describe several difficulties that arise as they attempt to teach these courses. Yet virtually no research has focused on examination of instructors' difficulties from a theoretical perspective. To examine the complex, intersecting dynamics that occur when teaching groups of counselor trainees about race and culture, we used Directed Content Analysis with theoretical guidance from the Racial Identity Social Interaction Model. We analyzed interviews obtained from instructors (n = 8) who had led small-group counseling skills labs with a multicultural and social justice perspective. Problematic dynamics occurred in three major domains, group, leader, and institutional dynamics. Implications for teaching about race and culture in group settings are discussed.

Keywords

Multicultural Education, Group Dynamics, Race, Culture, Supervision

Counselor training programs potentially play an integral role in the development of a racially and culturally responsive therapist workforce. Programs are well suited to support therapists' during training if they provide sufficient opportunities for trainees to understand the importance and effects of their own internalized race and culture on themselves as well as on their clients' presenting concerns. In fact, students' exposure to multicultural training has been associated with positive outcomes that may improve service delivery to people of Color. Improved services may help address issues related to mental health disparities, such as preventing early dropout rates and fostering engagement in care. Positive counselor outcomes identified in quantitative and qualitative research include increased cultural empathy, better skills in contextualizing problems in relation to race and culture, improved client reported clinical performance, and expanded multicultural knowledge (Chao, 2012; Smith, & Trimble, 2016; Sue & Sue, 2013).

In contrast to the identified benefits for students, numerous challenges of teaching and supervising counselor trainees with respect to race per se have been well documented (Burton & Furr, 2014; Sue et al., 2011). Challenges include (a) trainees' strong and varied emotions (e.g., anger, guilt, fear) in response to topics covered, (b) instructors' skills in coping with students' resistance to racial content, (c) trainees' disengagement from the instructional process, as well as (d) students' racial harassment and negative teaching evaluations of the instructors delivering such content (Carter, 2005; Helms et al., 2003; Sue et al., 2011). In addition, teachers and supervisors cite the difficulty of addressing an immense range of student developmental needs in the context of educational institutions that ignore or deny the importance of teaching racially and culturally responsive counseling skills (Smith, Kashubeck-West, Payton, & Adams, 2017).

Much of counselor preparation occurs in group or dyadic interactions in which the instructor attempts to communicate racially or culturally responsive knowledge, attitudes, and skills to counselors in training. Therefore, most of the challenges faced by instructors and trainees occur within group contexts. However, for the most part, the role of group dynamics in teaching about racial content specifically has been neglected in theory and research. Consequently, instructors enter group situations with little forewarning as to how to function most effectively when confronted concurrently by multiple types of trainee reactions.

Challenges to Teaching and Supervising Race and Culture Content

Courses in graduate training focused on multiculturalism may be the first time counseling students are exposed to topics such as White privilege, microaggressions, colonialism, and intersectionality (Priester et al., 2008). Scholars have identified a wide range of students' emotional reactions that may result from not having learned this type of thought-provoking material previously, which might evoke feelings of curiosity, validation, skepticism, guilt, hopelessness, and anger (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010). For example, Carter (2005) illustrated the challenges of navigating emotional reactions of teaching students in a semester-long Racial-Cultural Counseling course, where racial identity development was facilitated through didactic, experiential, and skill development exercises. Teaching assistants shared their difficulties managing the ways in which students "act[ed] out" in the process of learning about their own racial identity and perspectives on race and stereotypes (Carter, 2005, p. 45). Although instructors described rewarding aspects of witnessing student development as well as their own, they also noted the struggle of being on the receiving end of students' anger and hostility.

Given the intensity of some student reactions in multicultural counseling courses or seminars addressing race and culture, some scholars have examined the extent to which

instructors may be underprepared for leading these courses or trainings. Gloria, Rieckmann, and Rush (2000) and Burton and Furr (2014) stressed the importance for teachers of gaining supervised experiences, such as observing a course or working as a teaching assistant, before leading a class or group of their own. Another area in which instructor development has been addressed in the literature is a concern for instructors' understanding of their relative social locations relative to their students, which includes the examination of their own racial and cultural backgrounds and exploring their racial identity as it affects their work as therapists and instructors (Helms & Cook 1999).

Scholars have identified a possible gap between instructors' knowledge and skills when teaching multicultural issues to future counselors (Choudhuri, 2009). Furthermore, there are costs both to instructors and students, particularly students of Color, when instructors are underprepared to address a range of racial and cultural development in a group setting. For example, multicultural courses historically have focused primarily on teaching White students with the assumption that students of Color may be more advanced and require less attention to addressing personal biases (Sue & Sue, 2013). However, research on experiences of students of Color in these courses indicated that they cope with their feelings of alienation and isolation by choosing when and how to participate, withdrawing from the learning process, or protecting or advocating for their own racial group (Seward, 2014).

Instructors are challenged to adapt quickly to changing dynamics that can be complex and challenging to understand in group settings. Group instructors' lack of recognition of pertinent group dynamics may inhibit, stall, or promote the growth of students' understanding of race and culture in counseling. Yet relatively little theory or research has examined the extent to which interpersonal group dynamics specifically contribute to the teaching challenges that occur

when teaching (or learning) about race and culture. Use of theoretical models of group dynamics might support instructors in identifying reoccurring themes and conceptualizing the source of the problems, rather than having to apply interventions on a trial-and-error basis. Helms's (1990) Racial Identity Social Interaction Model may to be a useful framework for clarifying the nature of group dynamics in multicultural training.

Racial Identity Social Interaction Model

Helms's (1990) Racial Identity Social Interaction Model (RISIM) for groups integrates concepts from racial identity theory and power dynamics to describe racial dynamics that occur in group discussions about race. Racial identity development refers to individuals' understanding of their racial positionality as well as their perspectives on race in society. In group settings, students may understand racial dynamics by means of a variety of schemas, ranging from racially unsophisticated (e.g., racial evasiveness, overwhelm, confusion) to more integrated, complex, and self-affirming racial identity. The process of attributing meaning to race and developing a racial identity is relevant to mental health treatment in a racially contentious society. Furthermore, therapists and instructors' racial identities play important roles in the racial identity development of counselors in training and their clients (Helms & Cook, 1999).

Helms (1990) asserted that racial identity has more impact on group dynamics than does racial-group membership. The RISIM addresses the ways in which individuals within groups react to the meaning that they attribute to racial-group memberships rather than presuming that racial-group memberships per se determine behavior (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005). Therefore, the RISIM might be used as a framework to understand racially responsive teaching and the ways in which race-evasive and power-evasive behaviors can be deleterious to counselor development. In the model, power dynamics are transmitted through different combinations of

group members' (including instructors') racial identity schemas evoked in response to racial-cultural group content.

The RISIM proposes that group members' use of racial identity schemas may be described by four potential types of instructor-student relationships: (a) *regressive*, characterized by interactions in which one or more of the students in the group exhibits more advanced racial identity development than the instructor; (b) *progressive*, wherein instructors draw from their higher levels of self-affirming racial identity schemas to foster trainees' growth; (c) *crossed*, relationships wherein the instructor and students use schemas from opposite ends of the racial identity spectrum; and (d) *parallel*, described as instructor's and students' use of similar racial identity schemas (Helms, 1990). Ideally, instructors provide progressive rather than regressive relationships, because the latter lead to confusing and sometimes harmful participant experiences.

The RISIM model has primarily been studied in the context of dyadic supervision of therapist trainees. Studies of racially and culturally responsive dyadic supervision have found support for the various relationship types described in the RISM (Constantine, Warren, & Miville, 2005; Ladany, Brittan-Powell, & Pannu, 1997; Helms & Cook, 1999; Jernigan, Green, Helms, Perez-Gualdron, & Henze, 2010). These studies suggest that supervisors are better able to manage supervisees' complex emotions and assist them in integrating race and culture into the counseling process when supervisors have more advanced racial identities than their supervisees. Such progressive relationships potentially allow for optimal racially and culturally responsive development of supervisees. On the other hand, regressive relationships, that is supervisors with less advanced racial identities than supervisees, tend to leave supervisees reporting lower supervision working alliances, decreased trust in the supervisor, and feelings of confusion,

disappointment, and overall decreased engagement in the supervision process (Ladany et al., 1997; Lubbers 2013; Jernigan et al., 2010)

Helms (1990; Helms & Cook, 1999) adapted the RISIM to focus on coalitions as aspects of interpersonal dynamics unique to group settings (e.g., group therapy). *Coalitions* pertain to the power dynamics involving subgroup alliances in which allies share racial identity statuses when presented with racial/cultural stimuli (e.g., discussions about race). A principle of power psychology is that individuals form coalitions in order to seek more power to influence the group's goals, directions, and tasks (Helms & Cook, 1999). Thus, racial identity coalitions may include groups of students who, regardless of racial designation, experience racial issues similarly and purposefully or inadvertently self-protect by seeking to control the group process.

The instructor is charged with engaging in progressive relationships with all group members by assessing coalitions' racial identity themes and navigating the conflicts among them. Yet previous literature suggests that successful navigation requires the instructor to (a) recognize and manage the diversity of trainees' emotions and different levels of knowledge about race and culture, (b) cope with harassment, and (c) match interventions to the trainees' levels of development, while at the same time monitoring and managing one's own emotions and reactions (Carter, 2005; Sue et al., 2011). The RISIM model describes the complexity of racial identity group dynamics and potentially provides some structure for understanding challenges and rewards that occur when teaching about race and culture in groups.

Present Study

The RISIM model has helped researchers and supervision practitioners conceptualize racially and culturally responsive dyadic supervision (Constantine, Warren, & Miville, 2005; Ladany et al., 1997; Helms & Cook, 1999; Jernigan et al., 2010). Although the conceptual model

has been extended to describe group contexts, it has yet to be used in empirical research to study instructors' experiences in group counselor training settings. Thus, the present study aimed to examine the extent to which RISIM concepts were applicable to instructors' observations and experiences of group dynamics when teaching about racially and culturally responsive counseling skills in a group context. The research questions were: (a) What challenges do instructors perceive when attempting to teach racially and culturally responsive counseling skills in small group formats? (b) To what extent can challenges instructors face in group training be explained by the RISIM?

The data for the study were instructors' descriptions of their experiences in response to open-ended questions about their manner of teaching about race and culture. Directed Content Analysis (DCA), a qualitative methodology, was used to analyze the interview data because previous qualitative studies of RISIM in dyadic supervision had used DCA (Jernigan et al., 2010). Thus, in one sense the present study is an examination of the transferability of previous qualitative research findings and methods from dyadic supervision to small group classes. *Transferability* is analogous to external validity in quantitative research (Thomas & Milgilvy, 2011). Moreover, whereas most qualitative methodologies are intended to generate theory about or understanding of a phenomenon, DCA was particularly suitable for the present study because we intended to validate or extend RISIM as an existing theoretical framework. Transferability research is a desirable but rare practice in qualitative studies (Assarroudi, Nabavi, Armat, Ebadi, & Vaismoradi, 2018; Heish & Shannon 2005).

In the mental health counseling program that we studied, first year master's students are required to take a basic skills-building class in which racial and cultural responsiveness skills are infused. Doctoral students in a Counseling Psychology program, supervised by licensed

practitioners, teach these classes, which are called "labs." *Labs* consist of groups of 8 to 10 master's-level students, who meet weekly for one hour directly after attending a large lecture on Counseling Skills. Lab instructors or leaders use various teaching methods in the labs, such as practicing counseling skills and processing course material to support the master's students' counseling skill development from a social justice perspective. Depending on the topic of the week, lab instructors might select experiential group-based lesson plans from a curriculum developed by former doctoral students in the program that aimed to increase multicultural knowledge, awareness, and skills. In addition to the weekly lab, each group instructor holds bi-weekly dyadic supervision meetings with the students in their labs.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Lab instructors ($N = 8$) were doctoral students or former students who had taught at least one lab under the supervision of licensed mental health professionals during the last five years; one participant had taught two labs over the span of three years. The instructors identified as White ($n = 6$), Asian ($n = 1$), and Black ($n = 1$). Most of them identified as women ($n = 6$) and two identified as male ($n = 2$). Five of the lab leaders were former students in a lab during their master's program. The researchers who conducted the interviews (the first and third authors) included two doctoral students who identify as White and biracial (Asian and White) cisgender women, respectively.

Following approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researchers recruited participants via email. Participants had the option of completing their interview in-person or by phone, and all interviews were audio-recorded. Prior to the interviews, participants reviewed and signed a consent form and completed a brief demographic questionnaire. The length of each

interview ranged from 45 to 90 minutes. The interviewers and one research assistant transcribed the interviews. To confirm accuracy, researchers cross-checked randomly selected portions of transcriptions against audio recordings and found no errors.

Research Team

The three researchers who analyzed the data identified as women of Color ($n = 2$) and White ($n = 1$). All but one researcher, who is a professor and psychologist, were doctoral students in a counseling psychology program at the time of the study. The research team met weekly during the data analysis to discuss potential influences due to personal backgrounds and cultures, and they wrote research memos to document reactions to content and kept notes on coding decisions. Researchers reflected on their experiences both as instructors and students in classes in which content on race and culture was taught and noted how their perspectives might have shaped their process of analyzing the interview data.

Research Design

We were interested in discovering whether the same types of relationships that occur in dyadic supervision when race is the focus happen among coalitions or individuals within group classes (i.e., labs). Therefore, we used DCA to examine the applicability of RISIM and related dyadic supervision research for identifying main categories and subcategories, inferring meaning and links among identified categories and established coding rules, which included how theory non-conforming data would be recognized and coded. We prepared the data collection procedures (i.e., developed interview questions, conducted and transcribed interviews, and became immersed in the data.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interview content consisted of semi-structured, open-ended questions about instructors' racial experiences while teaching (e.g., What was it like to talk about race in your lab?) and group dynamics or particularly challenging events or scenarios (e.g., Can you describe an experience that was difficult to manage in talking about race, power, or privilege?) The open-ended questions allowed participants to shape the direction of the conversation and relay their expertise and unique experiences. The researchers prepared for the analysis by developing a codebook of tenuous categories and codes that reflected key concepts of RISIM theory and research (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Heish & Shannon, 2005). Example concepts are coalitions, subgroups or cliques whose responses to racial stimuli suggest similar racial identities, and power dynamics (e.g., feelings of powerlessness or attempts to gain more power in response to racial stimuli).

In the first phase of analysis, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading the entire transcripts several times to gain a holistic sense of the instructors' responses. Then, we segmented and coded interview responses based on the explicit and implied meaning of the interviewees' experiences of teaching. Examples of initial codes in the first round included: (a) labeling emotional experiences of leaders (e.g., "overwhelmed") or students (e.g., "frustrated") as described by the instructors; (b) labeling concepts taught (e.g., White privilege, trauma, racism); and (c) labeling methods for teaching or managing the group (e.g., structure, sharing decision-making with students, role-play exercises).

The second round of coding involved making connections across participants' codes to develop sub-themes. Finally, the authors connected inductively developed sub-themes with the predetermined RISIM codes. In the case where themes or text did not connect with RISIM, we assigned new codes and sub-themes as Hseih and Shannon (2005) recommended. The

researchers agreed that *saturation* or sufficient mining of the data had occurred when new data did not provide new categories or themes (Bowen, 2008; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Trustworthiness

One aspect of trustworthiness is ongoing reflexivity or self-examinations of the researchers' biases and positionalities as they might affect the topic under investigation throughout each step of the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We addressed reflexivity through weekly research meetings during which we discussed potential influences due to personal backgrounds and cultures, and wrote research memos to document reactions to content and kept notes on coding decisions. We reflected on our experiences both as instructors and participants in classes in which content on race and culture had been taught and noted how our perspectives might have shaped the process of analyzing the interview data. Moreover, to minimize personal biases, lab instructors' own words were used as much as possible when analyzing data (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002).

Results

RISM was used to structure the study design and method and DCA was used to determine whether the instructors' data fit the principles of the theory. Yet understandably, instructors did not articulate racial group dynamics in the language of RISIM (e.g., "I was struggling with this difficult coalition"). Accordingly, results are reported using themes most closely aligned with instructors' experiences and are later interpreted through the RISM model in the Discussion section. With respect to the first research question concerning functioning of coalitions, we found three core domains in the analysis of the interview content: (a) group, (b) leader, and (c) institutional dynamics. *Group dynamics* included instructors' observations of student experiences or events that lab leaders reported in the context of teaching about race and

culture. *Leader dynamics* encompassed the leaders' perceptions of their roles as teachers in the group context, especially with respect to their competency and authority. *Institutional dynamics* incorporated lab leaders' reported feelings about the extent to which their institution supported them in the process of teaching about race and culture.

Domain I: Challenges Related to Group Dynamics

Competing Developmental Needs of Group Members

One of the major difficulties identified by lab leaders was trying to meet the vast range of developmental needs in a small group. One lab leader stated, "It was really hard…everyone was in such different places." Lab leaders noted differences among the students around engagement in talking about race in a group setting, in a dyad setting, or in the context of written assignments. In particular, lab leaders described difficulty in getting all members of the group to participate in dialogues on racial and cultural identity in the group setting due to differences in group members' racial identity development.

I often found myself preoccupied with where everybody was [developmentally]. I felt a lot of pressure because people were in different places with their language around race and...I think I was just spending a lot of my energy trying to attend and figure out where everybody was and how to bring different people into the conversation.

A source of tension identified by lab leaders was associated with a notable divide between subgroups, or coalitions, of students. One coalition involved students who expressed a desire to discuss racial and cultural issues in therapy, as well as their own racial identity development. The other opposing coalition of students resisted talking about racial and cultural issues, either outwardly or by remaining silent in each of the possible training contexts. Lab leaders described

these coalitions as often including White students who resisted such discussions or, conversely, students of Color who expressed frustration with the lack of discussions about race and culture. Of note, these coalitions were not uniformly all White students avoiding race or all students of Color wanting to talk about race.

White lab leaders described their difficulties in navigating the opposing goals of each coalition. One leader noted:

> In trying to help people own their positions, I think I reinforced those lines. It was hard not to shame White students who had power in the room. I think there were times when I totally looked for the students of Color to like talk about their experiences, sort of carry the burden of needing to speak on behalf of the entire community of Color because I felt like I had no business doing so. And I felt like, am I like guilty now? And was I aligning with the White students? You know, it was really hard every time we talked about it.

Some lab leaders noted feeling torn between the different racial identity developmental needs of their White students and students of Color. Speaking about the White students, one instructor stated,

> I am mindful of the fact that you don't want to overwhelm [White students]... It's a really funny balancing act ... you're literally breaking them of all of their habits... and I know for a lot of my [White] students, they get super anxious and they don't feel like they are doing anything right... you want to help students think, but you don't want to overwhelm them.

However, in the process of not wanting to overwhelm the White students, lab leaders noticed how students of Color would often be the first and sometimes only students engaging in

discussions that related to race. As White students in the lab became increasingly aware of their privilege over the year, they also fell increasingly silent when race was brought up. One White lab leader recalled,

> A lot of times there would be some very long pauses. When we would have those discussions and it was sort of the tension of who is going to speak first. At this point, the White students being very aware of their privilege did not know what to say. And students of Color feeling like, "Do we *really* have to start the discussion again?

Lab leaders described how the tension between opposing coalitions of students seemed to impede the cohesion of the group. One lab leader also noted different responses of students of Color in their labs,

> Some of my students of Color really liked the opportunity to share with other people who haven't thought about their race, helping educate those people and kind of give them a window into their experience. Other students of color felt like, "You know what? I don't always want to be the only person talking about what it's like as a Latino woman. You want to learn about it? Go read a book." So, there was even a mix among the students of Color in terms of where they were and how they felt they could best engage with the class.

Scapegoating

Lab leaders described the challenge of remaining empathic and inclusive to students who became disliked by the group in discussions of race and privilege.   There were a few reasons why group members became scapegoats within the group during these conversations. Some cases pertained to students who rejected the privilege or role associated with their apparent racial

group membership. It was unclear to the lab leaders in these cases whether the students were attempting to avoid the reality of their unearned privilege or if their racial/cultural identity involved more complicated factors that the group struggled to understand. Lab leaders or group members who approached race and privilege "too aggressively" were also scapegoated. For example, one lab leader described how her prior experience being taught by a male of Color lab leader influenced the way she taught her lab.

I remembered what people had really strong reactions to. My lab leader [of Color] was a little upfront with exploring identities, exploring privilege, and people had a very strong aversive reaction to that. Our lab never coalesced. People had significant issues around that. So, I came away from that experience a little like 'Whoa'.

Across multiple interviews, leaders described lab members who, as deemed by the leader and/or the rest of the group, were the cause of conflict and tension in the lab. They were often described as students who rejected concepts related to the importance of understanding racial privilege. In other cases, group members may have been scapegoated because they did not behave in a manner consistent with the other group members' racial/cultural stereotypes. These students served as scapegoats for the discomfort that was evoked in the group while discussing issues of race and privilege. For example, in one instance, scapegoating occurred when a male student, who was classified as White by the other students in the group, rejected his White privilege by explaining that he has an African-American grandfather. The group felt as though the student was using this description of his race as a way to eschew acknowledgement of his racial privilege. The lab leader felt aligned with the group in its discomfort with the students' behavior.

That really had to do with the more general interpersonal dynamics that were going on in the room at the time. He wasn't particularly well received and his timing wasn't great. It's interesting, as I'm saying it, I feel like I was a bit aligned with the group…it felt like he was offering that information at a particular time to get out of having a more complicated conversation as opposed to really opening up and sharing something new.

Domain II: Challenges Related to Leader Dynamics

Racial Identity Development of Leaders

Leaders reported having difficulty facilitating conversations about race when the leaders felt their own racial identity development was at an early stage. Particularly for the White lab leaders, it was challenging to facilitate discussions on race when they themselves did not feel qualified to teach about the importance of race in counseling. One participant felt it would have been helpful for a person of Color to speak to the critical nature of addressing race in therapy instead of the lab leader.

I think having some sort of guest speaker. I felt weird for being a White male trying to convince them in some way about the experiences of other people. And I think if someone had come in and shared their experiences it might have clicked a little bit more…Someone actually sharing what they've been through and how they felt after it. I think that would have been very powerful for them.

Another felt concerned that students of Color would feel it was not the White instructors' place to speak to the importance of race.

And then…being a White woman…what is that going to be like for my students of Color? Maybe it will be a positive experience to have a White person

bring these issues up, talk about them, and acknowledge privilege…or [will they think], "What is this person doing? They think they know what it's like." You know, that type of reaction. So, I was nervous about that initially.

Other White lab leaders noted feeling overwhelmed by a variety of emotional responses to their students' reactions to race and privilege. These emotions ranged from feeling guilt, lost, confusion, frustration, and helplessness. Some of the emotions mirrored what their students described, whereas other emotions were related to attempts at supporting the developmental growth of their students.

I think I really struggled with my own White guilt around getting supervision when conversations on race came up and to figure out how there were interesting microaggressions that happened within the class and knowing when to interrupt them. And feeling like really, wanting to bring up race in ways that were relevant and not just to be a good White person. I think a lot of what was difficult is just sort of my own White guilt and trying to get past that and trying to actually be responsive to what the class needed rather than being obsessed where I was at with it and not where it was located within me and get that out of the way and do what we needed to do.

The instructors of Color in our sample highlighted the additional anxiety and difficulty specific to teaching as a person of Color. For instance, one woman said, "You're bringing up... the big elephant in the room… bringing up race and culture as a Black woman… you have to manage your own anxiety and make sure you're not reacting to that." Another instructor highlighted the challenges associated with teaching primarily White students as a person of Color:

I did talk a lot at them. I would say, 'Think about it… what does it mean for this woman of Color to come talk to you?' … but they never interacted with me when I would say things like that, at least in a group setting. So sometimes I felt like I was preaching or it felt like I was talking to myself…I sort of approached it as planting this seed and hopefully it will germinate at some point in their lives.

Leadership Style and Race-Gender Intersections

A common theme among the interviews was a notably different quality of approaching race and privilege based on intersections of lab leaders' socially ascribed identities. In particular, race and gender were associated with differences in teaching styles and outcome expectations. When approaching discussions on race, gender, and privilege, White female lab leaders described their difficulty achieving cohesion and safety for all participants in the group. Furthermore, White female lab leaders described an egalitarian approach of eliciting feedback throughout the process of teaching. Reflecting back on their teaching, however, they wished they had been more direct in talking about race and privilege. For example, one lab leader stated, *"I wish I could have held a little bit more firm for what my sense was for what the group might have needed, you know?"* In addition White female lab leaders described their difficulty and concern for adequately supporting their students' development. They reported feeling lost, confused, and sometimes helpless as they attempted to support all of the group members' racial identity growth, "I felt incredibly lost and like I don't know how to have these conversations. It was a lot internalized shame that came up. I don't have the language to talk about these things" Another White female lab leader noted,

I think the difficulty was my own. I really struggled with my own White guilt when conversations of race came up and knowing when and how to interrupt

microaggressions. I wanted to bring up race in ways that were relevant and not just to be a good White person. I think the difficulty was trying to get past my White guilt and actually be responsive to what the class needed rather than being obsessed where I was.

Women of Color lab leaders identified the awkwardness of teaching on race and culture in primarily White groups of students. In contrast to White women, the women of Color talked about the necessity of being more direct about addressing race and culture given their identity and appearance. For example,

I would model for them, I would share first of how a person might describe themselves. For a lot of them, I could tell when I described myself as a Black woman, just saying those words out loud is something that you know people don't really talk about in normal conversation. "Hi my name is [name], I'm a Black woman in case you can't tell." So just to verbalize that and give them permission, , “You can say these things, you're not being a racist by identifying your race.”

One female lab leader of Color found that she was far more successful over the course of teaching when she approached material on race and privilege more directly and early on. The women of Color also generally shared experiences of feeling isolated and invisible at times. This feeling of invisibility can be illustrated by a story shared by a female lab leader of Color when an outside professor interrupted her class. She shared her embarrassed efforts to joke with her lab when the professor assumed the White male student in the classroom was in charge. In addition, women leaders of Color also each struggled with managing the resistance and challenges from individual White males. One lab leader noted,

I had a particularly challenging White male in my lab. He would [be] challenging

different activities I selected, asking "Why are we doing this? How is this

helpful?' He was trying to take control of the lab, trying to dictate what was

happening. He would respond in what seemed like, very aggressively or it could

be interpreted very aggressively.

White male lab leaders approached teaching the lab in a qualitatively more structured

manner, focusing most of the time on activities related to counseling skill development. In their

facilitated discussions on privilege and power, they described their acute awareness of the role of

their own race and prior racial socialization. Moreover, their gender held a central role in

guiding their teaching decisions in the lab. One White male lab leader described his experience

of teaching a mostly female lab group.

I think I had to be very aware of my own male privilege. I did think about how

they saw me being a man. I was also aware when the other men were speaking

trying not to unconsciously agree with them a little bit more.

Domain III: Challenges Related to Institutional Dynamics

Institutional Support

Overall, the instructors expressed mixed feelings with regard to institutional support

specific to teaching race and culture. Although they felt their supervision and peer support was

generally emotionally supportive, some felt they needed additional tools for learning how to

teach about race, as well as resources to develop their own personal racial identity development.

For instance, one leader reported feeling unprepared to teach about race and culture:

We don't really get trained on how to teach race. We get this binder of great ideas,

but I think there is a big difference between having the knowledge and having

some ideas for the activities and actually executing the teaching. We all go into teaching having no teaching experience in general, let alone no teaching experience in talking about what are really difficult topics even for the best of teachers.

Another concern that arose in the interviews was related to a lack of programmatic support related to course sequencing. The lab leader considered that having students take a required multicultural class in their second year rather than their first communicated a lack of prioritization of issues related to race and culture.

I think they should start teaching the multicultural class in the first year, rather than the summer and then the 2nd year. Let people know from the beginning that this is what our program is about and addressed in all areas in all of our classes, rather than like a year late.

Lab leaders felt that they could have used additional support outside of their weekly supervision, although each of them felt supervision was helpful for emotional support specific to dealing with student issues or managing the stress of teaching for the first time. However, most of the participants felt as though they could have used additional supervision or training focused specifically on furthering their own racial identity, as well as facilitating growth in their students' racial identity. One lab leader described support-seeking efforts:

I had a colleague that did something called race lab that's an interpersonal process experience. I wish that I had, maybe on my own or through [institution], had a process experience myself that I could then translate. I think I need more opportunities to practice handling processing in the moment particularly around Whiteness. Or how to talk about race in the room when it is happening.

Similarly, another lab leader sought out additional support beyond the supervision provided. This lab leader felt she or he had a network of peer supports for sharing experiences and teaching resources.

> I sought out support from my cohort or other lab leaders and they were extremely helpful because they had taught a lab before. For me, I had a network, especially with being on a research team so I could talk about race and my experience, whereas I'm pretty sure other students didn't have a built-in system.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to understand the extent to which the RISIM extends to understanding challenging group dynamics from the perspectives of instructors when teaching on race and culture. A specific focus was whether relationship types and coalitions described by the theory pertained to the experiences of the instructors. The findings reveal that teaching beginning counselors about race and culture is a complex and nuanced process that requires supporting their racial identity development in some respect, as well as managing the instructors' own identity manifestations. Indeed, we found that key concepts of the RISIM did apply to group dynamics; these included (a) instructors offering regressive relationships to some of their students at times, (b) problems associated with scapegoating, and (c) intergroup conflict as a result of opposing racial identity coalitions. Therefore, in addition to identifying limitations in their own knowledge, skills, and awareness, instructors also identified relevant challenges in managing racial identity group dynamics in the absence of institutional support for teaching about race and culture.

Identity Development of Instructors

Racial identity schemas are useful for interpreting several aspects of the training, including instructors' own confidence in speaking about race, following up on students' comments with regard to race, and verbally addressing apparent tensions between students based on race and culture. As to be expected, the instructors varied in the extent to which they felt they could teach about the role of race and culture in therapy. Several of the instructors described experiences of feeling unqualified to teach about race and racial identity in therapy—sometimes because they perceived that students in the class knew more than they did and sometimes because they were trying to stop themselves from joining unhelpful coalitions. From the perspective of the RISIM, these instructors may have been offering regressive relationships for some of their students (depending on the students' and instructors' racial identities).

One relevant racial identity schema that may be interpreted from the lab leader's experience is pseudo-independence. Pseudo-independence, is characterized by an intellectual understanding of the importance of racial dynamics without the important emotional capacity to develop authentic racial empathy with people of Color or other racially less developed White people (Helms, 1992). An example of pseudo independent intellectualization in the interviews was some instructors' worries that their students would think it "wasn't their [the instructors'] place" to speak about issues of race; some rationalized that it might have been more effective for a guest instructor of Color to teach about the relevance of race in therapy.

Another White racial identity schema that was relevant in teaching about race and culture was Disintegration or confusion. Several of the White instructors described feeling an overwhelming sense of confusion and helplessness. When a White person is exposed to further knowledge regarding the injustice of racism, either emotionally or cognitively, disintegration may occur potentially as a change point(s) that moves them toward reintegration in their

development, perhaps as a not conscious strategy to protect oneself from anxiety feelings. When group leaders relinquish their competence in discussions about race or are perceived by counseling students as being incompetent, it is difficult to manage the emotions that unite student coalitions or help them to develop racially responsive skills (Jernigan et al., 2010).

Racial identity schemas were relevant as well for the instructors of Color who described their experiences of teaching mostly White labs where students were early in their racial identity development. At times, particularly in cases where White male students challenged them directly, the female instructors of Color described feeling insecurities about holding a position of power as the leader of the lab students. In terms of racial identity schema, dissonance may describe some of their reactions in those moments. Dissonance is an anxiety response to stimuli by which a person of Color, faced with internal conflict between their adherence to White supremacy values and a desire for positive associations with their own racial group, may feel insecure about maintaining a leadership role in the group context (Helms, 1990). However, other racial identity schemas were relevant in their experiences as well. Both the racial identity schemas of Internalization and Integrative Awareness were evident in the interviews, particularly as the instructors of Color gained further experience navigating student challenges and gaining support from others.

In addition to racial dynamics, instructors identified the significance of gender identity in the process of teaching. It is possible that the racial-gender intersection may also be viewed from the RISIM lens, illuminating how power dynamics interplay when teaching about race and culture in groups. Perhaps it is not surprising that very little literature exists relevant to race-gender intersections of lab leaders when teaching about race and culture in groups, but race-gender intersections of counselors and clients have been a focus in counseling literature more

generally (Franklin, 1999). In the present study, all of the instructors indicated that they were mindful of the role of gender privilege in their teaching, either as assets or as challenges to their success.

There were some qualitative differences between the ways in which instructors' gender identity and racial identity affected their performance of their roles. White Male instructors described taking a more directive approach, whereas White women, in particular, approached their labs much more collaboratively and spoke openly about their concerns that their racial identity may be insufficient to support the identity development of their students. Research on gender roles of teachers in higher education has found that women in comparison to men are expected to behave in a more nurturing manner, to respond flexibly to student demands, and if they deny requests, are more likely to experience adverse emotional responses from students (El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, & Ceynar, M. 2018). Thus, White female lab leaders may have felt the need to meet students' expectations through a democratic teaching style more than their male counterparts. However, Black female lab leaders shared the importance of being direct with their students when facilitating conversations about race. Further research may be necessary to understand the role of race-gender identity intersection on group dynamics when teaching counselors to be racially responsive.

Group Dynamics

Two major aspects of group dynamics revealed in the analyses were navigating competing coalitions and scapegoating. As previously explained, coalitions in the RISIM are subgroup alliances whose members use similar racial identity schemas when presented with a racial/cultural stimulus (e.g., discussions about race) (Helms & Cook, 1999). Instructors found it challenging to navigate between combatting coalitions. The coalitions evident from the

interviews were typically competing against one another in their desires to address or not address race, culture, and their own racial identity. However, this competition makes sense when framed by the RISIM. Coalitions defined by earlier racial identity schemas typically are more powerful in directing the group process (Helms, 1990). Therefore, an instructor may be sensitive to the conflict between the coalitions, but feel compelled to protect the powerful coalition(s) who avoid talking about racial issues, while not joining forces with the less powerful one(s) who are engaged by such discussions.

In the unique context of group instruction or supervision, it is critical for instructors to be knowledgeable about and able to analyze group dynamics related to racial identity. As Reynolds (2011) observed, group dynamics often are overlooked in multicultural pedagogical literature. Research on effective MCC pedagogy has thus far focused on the utility of one-on-one supervision and standard classroom settings (Vereen, Hill & McNeal, 2008). Yet the results of the present study of instructors' experiences, suggest that scholars and instructors need to understand more about social identity group dynamics in the group context (Helms & Cook, 1999).

Many of the instructors began their teaching with the intentions of developing safe or cohesive classes despite various differences in their own and class members' race, power, and privilege. However, the results of the present study suggest that maintaining emotional safety in group instruction on race when the members are invariably at various stages in their racial identity development may not be entirely possible or desirable (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Specifically, group practitioners contend that safety should not be a primary goal in discussions about race, particularly when groups are comprised of mostly White participants, because personal safety rather than social justice often guides the way many White people ordinarily

conceptualize racial issues in their lives (DiAngelo, 2011). In the context of many multicultural classes or diversity trainings, talking about race will not be equally safe for all students, given that students of Color approach such discussions from positions of racial disempowerment, whereas many White students enter from positions of unchallenged racial privilege (DiAngelo, 2011). Therefore, it is important for instructors to question the extent to which they are protecting coalitions in their group whose experiences the instructor shares or has shared.

In addition, scapegoating was an interesting dynamic that occurred in many of the labs. Instructors may have unknowingly participated in the process of scapegoating by not exploring more deeply the scapegoated students' behavior and the group members' reactions to the designated outsider students. In the present study, instructors reflected on how they might have been influenced by the perspectives of their group's coalitions and had not tried to fully understand the person who was being scapegoated. Scapegoating tended to occur in labs with strong coalitions comprised of pseudo independent White racial identity and immersion Person of Color racial identity. Hence, scapegoating is an important group dynamic to monitor for instructors teaching about race and culture. The RISIM suggests that similar power dynamics with respect to racial identity underlie coalition formation—perhaps not consciously (Helms, 1990; Helms & Cook, 1999). Instructors need to be able to inquire about and assess what characterizes the group power dynamics in ways that allow some students to join coalitions, whereas others are blamed for the group's issues. Scapegoating may occur in groups for many reasons, but instructors may need to evaluate the extent to which they may be participating in the process of isolating problematic students or supporting problematic coalitions. Furthermore, it would be helpful for teachers and researchers to identify helpful interventions to shift scapegoating dynamics when possible to promote further group development.

Institutional Context

ACA Advocacy Competencies (ACA, 2018) established the importance of understanding the role of the cultural context when advocating for racially responsive mental health services within systems. In other words, the institutional cultural and climate (i.e., policies, practice, leadership, and social norms) within which education and treatment occur likely have an influence the extent to which racial and cultural responsive teaching, therapy, or supervision occurs. Helms (2003) asserted that organizations demonstrate racial identity schemas through implementation of practices and policy, which means that organizational environments can either be growth promoting or stagnating and inhibiting.   The academic institutional context of the skills labs played a role in the process of teaching about race and culture according to the instructors. The instructors mainly shared their perspectives on the extent to which they felt they could use more support from their academic institution to help advance their own racial identity development, which according to the RISIM may indicate a regressive relationship with their institution. Although they felt supported in certain ways related to educating counselors, they did not feel entirely prepared to integrate issues of race and culture in their teaching. They coped with the challenges of teaching on race by using positive self-talk, seeking out additional support, and acknowledging their limitations in meeting everyone's needs.

Scholars and instructors would potentially benefit from examining the racial climate of their institution generally (Helms, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2013). For example, it may behoove scholars to contextualize the racial identity development of instructors within their academic environments and to review the extent to which institutions support the teaching of these difficult courses/trainings. In addition, scholars and instructors may want to examine how racially responsive ideology is manifested in coursework and the choice of instructors of relevant

courses, while ensuring that systemic support systems are in place for instructors and students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds.

Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Although our findings add to the literature on racial responsiveness development of mental health counselors, the present study has limitations pertaining to (a) sample characteristics, (b) method of data collection, and (c) method of analysis. First, the sample of interviewed instructors was relatively small and homogenous. That is, instructors were in the same doctoral program and most were White women. However, it should be noted that although the sample was relatively small, the participants led 10 labs in total, each containing at least 10 students ($N = 100$ in total). Since the purpose of the study was to fully examine challenges and dynamics of teaching lab groups as they typically occur in counselor training programs, further exploration of group dynamics would likely involve relatively small numbers of participants. Nevertheless, future studies would benefit from researchers' examining larger and more diverse samples in order to capture the complexity of teaching experiences. This goal might be accomplished by other researchers examining instructors in diverse settings in multiple helping fields, and at varying levels of education and experience.

Second, the counseling trainees' experiences from their perspectives were not a focus of the present study. Consequently, conclusions about the students' subjective experiences of growth and development are limited. Future researchers might consider interviewing trainees in the same settings about their perceptions of their own racial responsiveness development. Third, instructors were not actually interviewed about their own racial responsiveness training experiences and thus it remains unclear the extent to which the quantity and/or quality of previous training affected the instructors' ability to facilitate growth in their students. Therefore,

additional research incorporating questions about instructors' own training may allow for a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to racially and culturally responsive teaching faced by group facilitators serving as counselor educators.

Finally, there are benefits and drawbacks of Directed Content Analysis. Although a theoretical basis for studying racial dynamics that occur in group instruction may lead to a deeper or clearer understanding of complex interpersonal interactions, DCA is more directive than most qualitative approaches. Accordingly, the method may be more biased toward confirming the applicability of a theory than otherwise. Thus, further research both quantitative and qualitative, would be important to more fully understand how the RISIM applies to racial group dynamics that occur in group training contexts.

Conclusion

Racially and culturally responsive training is supposed to be a core element of counselor training, which contributes to the development of increased knowledge, awareness, and empathy of counselor trainees (Chao, 2012; Smith, & Trimble, 2016; Sue & Sue, 2013). Therefore, programs that train mental health counselors should aspire to facilitate the development of a racially responsive mental health workforce as a mechanism for addressing the social injustice of racial mental health disparities. Nevertheless, the present study's findings reinforce the reality that it is difficult to be an effective and supported racially responsive instructor. We hope that the Racial Identity Social Interaction model can provide some support to scholars, instructors, and supervisors in navigating and embracing the complexities and challenges, as well as the wealth of growth-promoting opportunities, of racially responsive group instruction.

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