

2023

Words Matter: The 7th Edition APA Publication Manual and Bias-Free Language Use in Counselor Education

Gregory S. Phipps

Walden University, gregory.phipps@mail.waldenu.edu

Sarah N. Baquet

Brooklyn College, sarah.baquet@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Jehan Hill

jehanhill@gmail.com

Juan Pantoja-Patiño

juan.pantojapatino@gmail.com

Yoon Suh Moh

Thomas Jefferson University, yoonsuh.moh@jefferson.edu

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps>



Part of the [Counselor Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Phipps, G. S., Baquet, S. N., Hill, J., Pantoja-Patiño, J., Moh, Y., & Jenkins, K. (2023). Words Matter: The 7th Edition APA Publication Manual and Bias-Free Language Use in Counselor Education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 17(2). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/jcps/vol17/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact lysobeyb@sacredheart.edu.

Words Matter: The 7th Edition APA Publication Manual and Bias-Free Language Use in Counselor Education

Abstract

The use of culturally sensitive, bias-free language is a key aspect of research and practice for counselor educators. This article discusses the recent changes to the 7th Edition of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual regarding bias-free language and its impact on counselor education and supervision. In addition, we provide several case study scenarios to assist counselor educators in their work with specific student groups impacted by the 7th edition changes.

Keywords

APA 7th edition changes, language, multicultural, culturally inclusive, counselor educator

Authors

Gregory S. Phipps, Sarah N. Baquet, Jehan Hill, Juan Pantoja-Patiño, Yoon Suh Moh, and Kalesha Jenkins

Over the past several decades, multicultural and social justice-oriented scholarship has become progressively integrated into the literature that defines professional counseling theory, practice, and research (Öksüz, & Brubaker, 2020; Ratts et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2020; Vera & Speight, 2003). Counseling research and scholarship significantly impact counseling with clients, thus translating research to practice is a key function of a culturally informed counselor. As multiculturalism and social justice concepts continually evolve, it is imperative that counselors stay abreast of new knowledge and understandings. One of the foundational components of culturally informed and inclusive counseling andragogy is language and its use. In the context of this article, *culturally informed and inclusive counseling practice* includes 1) understanding the value of an individual or group's cultural characteristics, 2) how these characteristics can impact the life of the individual *and* the counseling relationship, 3) pertinent practice and treatment strategies, and 4) the importance of all individuals feeling respected and understood.

Language greatly affects the cultural inclusivity of diverse communities because it tailors how people are perceived and considered in society. At a practical level, language provides a glimpse into culture. It facilitates the way in which information is shared, as well as provides insight into and helps define aspects of a person's identities (Rossi & Lopez, 2017). For example, when thinking about a person's positionality, there is power in how a marginalized individual self-identifies and how those they interact with use language to identify that individual; especially if the use does not align with the individual's self-identification. To illustrate this point, consider a non-binary individual whose pronouns are "they/them" and someone referring to them as "he/him" (if visibly presenting as masculine). Such invalidation, intentional or not, can be hurtful for someone who wants to be seen as their authentic self. In a similar vein, the use of gender and

sexual orientation bias-free language can be employed as a tool for advocacy and support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) community (Noble et al., 2021).

Professional counseling standards and competencies have evolved to support efforts toward inclusive and unbiased professional practice and language use. In addition to the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016), several competencies within the 19 divisions and one affiliated group of the American Counseling Association (ACA) have been created. These competencies include the Competencies for Counseling Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally Individuals (ALGBTIC LGBQQA Competencies Task Force, 2013), the Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (ALGBTIC, 2009), the Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Population (Kenney et al., 2015), and the Disability-related Counseling Competencies (Chapin et al., 2018). These competencies strive to support culturally inclusive professional counseling identities and non-biased language use in practice.

In alignment with the nationally recognized commitment to positioning professional counseling scholarship practices within an intersectional and culturally inclusive framework using competencies, this article highlights the 7th edition of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual's inclusive standards, with a specific focus on bias-free language used in the teaching, supervision, and practice of counselor educators. As the publication manual is the primary source for guidelines related to language use and writing in the counseling field, it is essential that counselors are familiar with and able to implement current guidelines. We share an overview of the APA Publication Manual's history and how it has evolved over time. We also discuss each of the topics mentioned in the bias-free language chapter of the APA manual, providing further examples and ideas related specifically to counselor education. In addition,

specific scenarios are given of how these changes impact the practice of counselor educators. Lastly, ideas and limitations for the future of APA in the counseling profession are examined.

History of APA Publication Manual and Bias-Free Language

In October 2019, the American Psychological Association (APA) published the 7th edition of its Publication Manual, notably delineating inclusive writing guidelines aimed at reducing bias. Among the most significant guideline shifts is the introduction of a global intersectional paradigm that all writers and researchers must adopt. An intersectional lens situates scholars within multiple dimensions of identities and social systems as they intersect with one another, including racism, genderism, heterosexism, and ageism, among others (APA, 2020b; Crenshaw, 1991). This framework recognizes social systems in which the privileged and marginalized intersect, informing diverse, nuanced individuals' lived experiences. Intersectionality reminds counselor educators that any consideration of a single identity or context must incorporate an analysis of the ways other identities and contexts combine with and change the experience of that single identity/context. It should be noted that marginalization should be viewed as the result of a process of social systems and individual interactions and not as the result of personal cultural characteristics. The latter may take a deficit lens to address cultural characteristics. Further, an intersectional lens ought to be embodied by entities at multiple levels. Leading professional organizations like APA promote the advancement and application of inclusive writing guidelines globally. Through this implementation, many other organizations, and professional disciplines such as counseling adopt the guidelines similarly.

Named after the American Psychological Association (APA), the APA format arose from a need for publishers to save time and money, as well as ensure a uniform writing style to prevent extraneous wording, formatting problems, and lack of concise content (Breitenbach, 2016). The

guidelines originated from a conference paper in *The Psychological Bulletin* written by the *Conference of Editors and Business Managers of Anthropological and Psychological Periodicals* in late November/early December of 1928. With the support of the *Division of Anthropology and Psychology of the National Research Council*, a set of formatting guidelines were recommended as a writing standard of procedure (Bentley et al., 1929) and published in the February 1929 issue of the *Psychological Bulletin* (VandenBos, 1992). This original set of guidelines did not include any reference to what we now refer to as *bias-free* language or how to respectfully refer to specific people groups. Instead, the guidelines primarily focused on page layout and the use of illustrations and figures. As Breitenbach (2016) points out, the original authors' view of guidelines were recommendations, unlike the modern viewpoint of a *right* and *responsibility* to set standards, especially for the APA's journals. The underlying intent though remains the same – to ensure clear communication (Breitenbach, 2016). Since 1929, APA style has been updated to reflect the changing needs of scholarship (APA, 2022). Four primary versions have been created, starting in 1944, then expanded in 1952, and for the first time referred to as the “Publication Manual” (VandenBos, 1992). Further revisions were made in 1957 and another in 1967. The second official edition titled the “APA Publication Manual” was released in 1974. In 1974, the first guidelines related to inclusive language were introduced because of a pilot study called “Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals” (VandenBos, 1992). An APA-appointed task force was created to do a content analysis of graduate psychology textbooks to find any potential “erroneous and harmful representations” of either sex (APA Task Force, 1975, p. 682). The guidelines that emerged from this study were included in the 1974 edition of the APA Style Manual. Since that time, the APA has made modifications to the manual to help reduce bias in areas such as age, disability, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and more. The recent edition of the Manual,

published in October 2019, includes the most extensive updates to bias-free and inclusive language to date, expanding the list of guidelines from 8 pages in the sixth edition to 19 pages in the current edition (APA, 2010; APA, 2020a; Noble et al., 2020). As the APA (2019) mentions in their web section on Bias-Free Language, writers should “avoid perpetuating prejudicial beliefs or demeaning attitudes in their writing” (para. 1).

Cultural Inclusivity and Language Bias

The importance of language and the way in which terms are used in the helping professions is more than simply to fulfill a standard set of guidelines. Rather, it impacts how specific people groups are considered and understood - either to promote and uplift them or to dehumanize them. Moreover, the American Counseling Association’s code of ethics addresses the need for counseling professionals to stay knowledgeable on sociocultural considerations including the evolving contextual nature of language and its application to maintain cultural responsiveness to individuals from different backgrounds (American Counseling Association, 2014). In doing so, it is imperative for such individuals to become more familiar and comfortable employing contextually appropriate bias-free language pertaining to issues such as LGBTQ+ issues (Noble et al., 2021). The use of biased language described as an “implied or irrelevant evaluation of the group or groups” being written about (APA, 2020b, p. 213) can be associated with varied, negative implications, particularly in the context of human relationships. As language use specifically relates to diversity and inclusion, it is vital to consider how terminology used in research and scholarship, and educational materials for the counseling profession influences thoughts, opinions, and decisions within the counseling profession and beyond (Krishnamurthy, 1996).

In addition to professional rhetoric being used to empower, affirm, or denigrate individuals or groups of people, the use of non-biased language can have profound effects on a person’s sense

of belonging, self-efficacy, and identity at the intrapersonal level (Harrison & Tanner, 2018). There are also impacts on relational dynamics at the interpersonal level as well. For example, in one study, counseling professionals who encountered the premodified term “schizophrenic” were less likely to have benevolent views and more likely to have socially restrictive views toward people with schizophrenia in comparison to those who saw the postmodified language use (e.g., “people with schizophrenia”; Granello & Gorby, 2021). When privilege and marginalization are centered on language, both inclusive and exclusive language is brought to the forefront. Therefore, it is paramount for counseling professionals to intentionally integrate cultural inclusivity into all they do, which includes culturally sensitive language. For counselor educators and the students they work with, thorough knowledge and understanding of culturally sensitive language is prominently displayed in their writing.

Reducing Biased Language: Key Considerations

The 7th Edition APA Publication Manual provides authors with guidelines to reduce bias within their writing, by topic and as a general overview. The overview highlights the importance of language, suggesting authors engage with the communities or groups they are writing about to avoid outdated language or language bias (APA, 2020b). This facilitates language sensitivity by acknowledging the humanness of study participants. The researcher must also be aware of how language fluctuates and to utilize their best discretion when participants label themselves in a way that might further perpetuate stigmatization or discrimination. The APA manual specifically addresses this by asking that users always use terminology that participants identify as, rather than relying on the manual as an end-all-be-all (APA, 2020b, pp. 133-134). Incorporating these actionable steps in the writing process, alongside the opportunity to take a reflective stance individually and collectively, helps counselor educators in their teaching and research to avoid

using discriminatory language while recognizing the experiences and discourse used by the populations served. In addition to a general overview, the APA 7th edition (2020b) also provides information regarding language use when writing about specific topics such as age, disability, gender, research participation, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status (SES), and intersectionality (APA, 2020b; Ayubi, 2019). We address these topics in the order presented by APA in Chapter 5 of the manual. The following topics are discussed individually; however, each topic is fluid and dynamic.

Age

Researchers should be cognizant of the impact of binary, gendered terms related to age (e.g., boy, girl), and utilize terminology self-described by the participant(s). While “individual” or “person” are acceptable, avoid “male” or “female” as nouns, opting instead for “men,” “women,” or “other age-appropriate words (APA, 2020b, p. 135). APA (2020b) delineates appropriate terminology to use based on age range. For example, appropriate descriptors for individuals 12 or younger might include “gender-fluid child,” “girl,” “transgender boy,” or “child,” to name a few. For individuals between the ages of 13-17 years old, APA suggests terms such as “adolescent” or “youth” (p. 135). When referring to older adults, researchers should be aware of current language usage and avoid terms that stigmatize aging. Authors need to be informed when reporting common demographic information regarding gender and age as this focus on language sensitivity helps reduce marginalization when conducting research (APA, 2020b).

Disability

Much like social class, such as socioeconomic status (SES), the term disability is a broad category that encompasses a vast population with unique life experiences. Due to varied views on this term and its associated usage, counseling professionals, as researchers and scholars, need to

understand the subcultures of disability status and adhere to the culturally inclusive language utilized within the community. Again, APA (2020b) places an emphasis on avoiding language that further marginalizes and oppresses individuals with disabilities, requiring the counseling professionals as researchers to engage with participants and access current resources regarding terminology. An importance is placed in the manual on understanding when to use person-first language (e.g., a person with a disability), as opposed to a “disabled person” or identity-first language (e.g., amputee, autistic person). However, it is also imperative to recognize and honor the way individuals with disabilities describe their disability-related identity. For instance, many individuals with a hearing impairment may self-identify as “hard-of-hearing” or “deaf” as opposed to a “person with a hearing impairment” given the culturally and socially sanctioned use of this language in the deaf community or world. To some, these are aspects of their identity and not using them in a description is to remove an important aspect of who they are.

In addition, there is mention of the importance of stating a disability in research and practice, when appropriate. This representation helps readers to understand how people with disabilities are included in research and why it is important (e.g., representation, relevance to the topic of research). Lastly, the manual includes explanations and guidelines for the avoidance of language that is negative or condescending. Examples include descriptions such as “confined to a wheelchair,” “cripple,” and “high functioning,” (APA, 2020b, p. 137) and euphemisms such as “special needs” and “physically challenged.” Instead, focus on the capabilities of the person, instead of deficits.

Gender

Demographic information of research participants typically includes age and gender information. However, “gender” and “sex” should not be used interchangeably, as they refer to

two different concepts. Gender is a social construct used to describe a specific social group. APA states that gender includes “the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex” (APA, 2019, p. 138). The term “sex” refers to biological differences and is assigned at birth. Researchers collecting this demographic information should be aware of their intentionality when analyzing this information and strive for inclusivity regarding gender identity and pronouns. For instance, one of the significant changes in the seventh edition of the APA Publication Manual (2020b) is the emphasis on using gender-neutral language, such as “they” as a singular pronoun. This shift reduces heterosexist bias in the way readers perceive the individuals referred to in the text (e.g., eliciting gender stereotypes, assumptions) and it communicates gender-inclusive awareness, acceptance, and affirmation.

Participation in Research

The new APA publication manual (2020b) informs the researcher to purposely utilize inclusive, bias-free language when referring to participants in research studies. Specific terms should be used, when appropriate, depending on participants’ contexts, such as “college students” or “children.” Within all contexts, counselor educators need to respect the cultural preferences expressed by participants when choosing the language to describe participants. For instance, when reporting participants’ salient characteristics (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity), counselor educators should articulate how participants’ characteristics and group memberships intersect in ways relevant to the study (APA, 2020b). Likewise, when reporting and interpreting the results, discussing the impact of any intersections on the findings, rather than assuming one characteristic is responsible for what was found needs to be discussed. Additionally, researchers should utilize active versus passive voice when describing the actions of the researchers and participants. This focus honors the participant’s experience while promoting the need for counselor educators to be

inclusive in their language, given the dynamics of marginalization, like biased language (Singh et al., 2020). As language evolves, so should counselor educators' inclusive language, especially since many diverse individuals, communities, and populations are affected by their work.

Racial and Ethnic Identity

Racial and ethnic identity descriptors also call upon the researchers to respect the terminology utilized by the participants to honor their experiences. APA (2020b) provides readers with a grammatical overview of utilizing racial and ethnic terms and information regarding word choice for specific groups. For example, racial and ethnic terms should be capitalized as they are considered proper pronouns, especially when referring to terms associated with a person's race (e.g., Black v. black). APA also brings awareness to differing concepts of race and ethnicity by providing definitions to help guide researchers when describing participants. Racial categories are constructed based on phenotypes to define groups and populations. Due to this social construction of race, researchers need to be aware that these categories are not universally accepted. Ethnicity is defined as "shared cultural characteristics such as language, ancestry, practices, and beliefs" (APA, 2020b, p. 142). Researchers also need to refrain from describing groups monolithically, instead highlighting individuals' immense experiences encountered based upon their intersecting identities. APA also asks to avoid the term "minority" unless using a descriptor such as "racial minority" or "ethnic minority" (APA, 2020b, p. 145). It is important to note that the term "minoritized" or "minoritization" better recognizes societal oppression and marginalization of individuals who hold the socially constructed category of minority status (Sotto-Santiago, 2019; Stewart, 2013).

Sexual Orientation

APA (2020b) discusses updated terminology when describing sexual orientation. Suggestions include using identity-first language when referring to sexual orientation and avoiding the use of outdated terms. Counselor educators should also be mindful of the ways inclusive language manifests in their linguistic expression, whether it be verbal or through sign language. For example, counselor educators who work with sexually minoritized students can incorporate proactive and affirming language to combat heterosexist language and teach those counseling students the importance of affirming language with clients. For example, avoiding the use of forced-choice responses or gender pronouns on counseling intake forms that describe a client's partner as the opposite gender in the absence of information about their partner's gender (Dorland & Fischer, 2001). In doing so, the counselor avoids perpetuating a powerful and exclusionary message to sexual minority clients by inadvertently assuming they are heterosexual. Moreover, such exclusionary language may invalidate the client's sexual orientation or create feelings of invisibility. Therefore, it is imperative to actively explore how language can be inclusive or exclusive when working with sexual minority students and clients. If not, systems of oppression are reinforced by biases in language. Counselor educators also have the responsibility to use inclusive language in their research, training, and supervision approaches. Doing so ensures they avoid discriminating and demeaning language for their students and the clients those students will serve.

SES

SES is a key component of demographic information, often connected extensively to mental health outcomes (APA, 2020b). APA points out that SES is comprehensive, referring to many aspects. Historically, marginalized racial and ethnic groups have been the focus of negative assumptions about SES (APA, 2020b; e.g., when stating "the poor" it was assumed this was a

racial or ethnic minority person or group). Counselor educators should be mindful of this in their teaching and research. For example, when conducting research, educators should provide a detailed account of their participants' SES including education level, income, and current employment in their reporting. The readers of the study need to understand the complexities of SES and how the participants are situated within the concepts being studied. Emphasis is placed on person-first descriptors and avoiding deficit language when describing the intricacy of SES. For example, descriptors such as “the homeless” or “ghetto” are considered negative and should be avoided. In addition, APA recommends including racial and/or ethnic descriptors when describing SES categories. To avoid the possibility of negative stereotyping, when reporting research an author might say “low-income White mothers” rather than simply “low-income.”

Intersectionality

A notable addition to the APA manual update is the inclusion of intersectionality to acknowledge bias and encourage inclusive language. Introduced by Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality promotes inclusive language as an opportunity for liberatory praxis, as it decolonizes biased language. Otherwise, the language used by privileged identities will continue to exclude certain groups (e.g., transgender, genderqueer, PWDs, sexual minorities) which in turn benefits current racist, classist, ableist, and heterosexist systems by subordinating marginalized voices (Scharrón-del Río & Aja, 2020). Each of the bias-free language topics was discussed individually to highlight how systems of oppression may be affected by each topic. At the same time, each topic is fluid and dynamic. Therefore, counselor educators should consider how a single identity or context interacts with other identities and contexts, which will ultimately change the experience of a single identity/context.

Discussion and Implications

The impact of language is a crucial ethical consideration within the counseling profession given the inherent nature of relational work counseling professionals, such as counselors, counselors in training, and counselor educators, conduct. With language continually evolving, it is an ethical obligation that counseling professionals stay informed on these updates and changes, to ensure they are prepared to work effectively with a range of client populations (ACA, 2014). Language impacts how clients view themselves, how counselors serve those clients, and how counselor educators train future counselors to serve (Torres-Rivera et al., 2008). Counselor educators should also consider the importance of language because it informs practice and policy in a plethora of ways, at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, and the systemic level, respectively. Language can perpetuate and reinforce power and dominant structures (Fairclough, 1989). Counselor educators who continuously discuss only the narrative of the privileged group may perpetuate that group's power and dominance, leading to furthering the disproportionate representation in relational structures and dynamics (Mertens, 2010). By repeatedly discussing the privileged narrative, it reinforces the dominant structure and furthers a lack of representation of the marginalized and minoritized in the counseling literature. Further, research helps define complex concepts and non-dominant structures marginalized populations face. Marginalized groups and individuals face a great deal of discrimination in the dominant structure that often excludes their voice within the current narrative. Fivush (2010) discusses the concept of being silenced by not having a voice in the dominant narrative, forcing the perpetuation of marginalized status. Without defining and discussing the concerns of marginalized groups in literature, the voices of the population will continue to be silenced. Thus, research allows for the space to be included in the current narrative.

Marginalization should be viewed as the result of a dynamic process of social systems and individual interactions and not as the result of personal cultural characteristics. Therefore, it is imperative counselor educators make that distinction to accurately label the dynamics of oppression and avoid the proliferation of a distorted narrative in counseling scholarship and training. For many counseling students, their counselor training is one of the contexts where they develop epistemologies that will inform their work. If inclusive language and intersectionality are not centered in these epistemologies, trainees will be socialized to uphold hegemonic practices and paradigms. Intersectionality reminds counselor educators to interrogate systems of oppression by understanding the constellation of identities and how systems of oppression award power and privilege to certain groups based on one's identities. Traditionally, researchers operationalize their social constructs as single, fixed traits; frequently combining multiple identities in their studies. However, the inclusion of multiple identities in the study sample does not necessarily qualify as intersectionality. Intersectionality is not determined by *whom* you study but by *how* you study.

The 7th edition revisions of the APA Publication Manual (2020b) direct those using APA style to appreciate inclusive language relative to diverse individuals through teaching, research and scholarship, advocacy, and leadership. Counselor educators are compelled to inform their practice and research implications with approaches concerning social justice and advocacy. Using and optimizing non-biased language and inclusive language can serve as a liberatory intervention that invites engagement in looking from the perspective of the oppressed or with marginalized identities and not the oppressor (Scharrón-del Río & Aja, 2020; Singh et al., 2020). Often biased language derives from individuals who do not share the marginalization status of the group to whom the language is in reference to. Inclusive language can be used to support marginalized individuals politically and economically (Öksüz & Brubaker, 2020).

Representation and visibility, albeit important, are pivotal to diverse individuals whose existence is continually overlooked or silenced. The limited acknowledgment of marginalized individuals in counseling literature via biased language not only makes them inconspicuous, but also reduces opportunities for counselors and counselor educators to develop practice recommendations, support advocacy and prevention efforts, as well as transmit knowledge to the next generation of counselors. Hence, engaging in inclusive language makes a commitment to social justice, a foundational value in counseling (Vera & Speight, 2003), by communicating awareness, acceptance, and affirmation of the voices of underrepresented groups. Thus, the new changes in the APA (2020b) publication manual disrupt the hegemonic writing standards/process, including biased language. Knowing the changes is not enough. What do these changes mean practically speaking for counselor educators, the students they serve, and those students' future clients?

The APA 7th edition promotes the use of bias-free language, demonstrated in the following examples. The example scenarios are designed to show the contextual nature of cultural language and how to apply bias-free language in counselor education. Though specific cultural characteristics of characters in the examples are important to consider, we have purposely left some of these factors out to eliminate any inherent bias on the part of the reader and to stimulate critical thinking. While absorbing the following examples, consider the following culturally reflective questions: (1) "What cultural factors are mentioned about each character and why are they important?", (2) "How might my own understanding of these characteristics impact each situation?", and (3) "How does incorporating bias-free language positively or negatively influence each scenario?"

Example Scenarios for Counselor Education

In the following section, we provide three case study example scenarios describing the application of bias-free language in counselor education in the following areas: general language use, conceptualizing and studying disability in counseling research, and pronoun use. This is not an exhaustive list; rather simply to give a few examples of how bias-free language might come up in counselor education.

Scenario #1 – General Language Use

Dr. LeQuan Timms (he/him) identifies as a cisgender, Black counselor educator at a large, predominantly White university. Dr. Timms understands the importance of teaching students to learn to write effectively while infusing cultural considerations into practice. Dr. Timms has extensively reviewed the APA 7th edition manual changes in Chapter 5 on bias-free language and incorporates ideas into his teaching related to specific language use. One way he does this is to update the course materials for his *Introduction to Counseling* course to remove the word “homosexual” when referring to sexual minority groups (APA, 2020b, p. 147). Instead, he incorporates specific, identity-first terms such as “transgender people” and “queer individuals” (APA, 2020b, p. 146). Next, Dr. Timms implements several modules in his *Research Methods in Counseling* course specifically designed to help students understand the impact of language use in research and how this informs practice. For each module, he includes a brief section on writing and the relevant APA standards to consider. For example, one module includes the importance of using specific racial and ethnic descriptors when reporting SES, so readers do not automatically assume “low-income” is talking about racial or ethnic minorities (APA, 2020b, p. 148). In addition to the introductory counseling course and research course, Dr. Timms also supervises a small cohort of students in their practicum experience. Like the research course, Dr. Timms discusses with his cohort of students how the language used in a case summary or case notes might impact

a client. For example, Dr. Timms points out a clinical case vignette that describes a client as “a schizophrenic,” when they prefer to self-identify as “an individual with schizophrenia,” to his class. He provides room for discussing the implications of word choice and labels with clients, guided by empirical support (Granello & Gorby, 2021).

Scenario #2 – Conceptualizing and Studying Disability in Counseling Research

Jacque (she/her) is an international student in Dr. Timm’s *Research Methods in Counseling* course. Jacque immigrated to the United States approximately 10 years ago with her family. As supported by research, language and communication patterns are substantially related to thoughts (e.g., thinking patterns; Torres-Rivera et al., 2008). Dr. Timms proposes an experiential exercise in the class designed to facilitate an understanding of the importance of language use and its connection to thinking. During the exercise, Dr. Timms intentionally encourages his students to collectively explore culturally inclusive “strategies for advocating for employment supports for individuals facing barriers in the workplace” (The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs; CACREP 2021, p. 14). To help put this exercise in context, Dr. Timms provides a case study descriptive of those who have an acquired hearing impairment and who are expected to attend hearing culture-centered business meetings at work. He encourages Jacque and the other students to increase their awareness of the importance of advocating for an inclusive work environment viewed from a strength-based and culturally inclusive perspective – a work environment designed to help maximize residual capabilities, abilities, and skills of hearing-impaired individuals, while minimizing and/or reducing barriers (e.g., communication challenges or dissonance in a preferred, primary mode of communication among co-workers). Through this experiential exercise, Jacque, as a counseling student researcher, is encouraged to conceptualize disability as a general topic of study and subsequently explore advocacy efforts. Furthermore, she

is also encouraged to approach such individuals as her future research participants from a strength-based lens as opposed to a deficit-based perspective (APA, 2020b, p. 136). This intentional facilitation by Dr. Timms could help reduce a bias in conceptualizing disability as a problem to be studied and shift a paradigm in students' methodological approaches. This, in turn, could influence the use of the students' bias-free language toward their research participants. For example, using person-first language and avoiding negative euphemisms (APA, 2020b). Dr. Timms' instructions align with the counseling literature that states, "language shapes experience and experience shapes language" (Torres-Rivera et al., 2008, p. 23).

Scenario #3 – Pronoun Use

Sierra (they/them) is another of Dr. Timms' master-level students in the practicum course. They come from a large metropolitan city where they were actively involved in advocacy for the LGBTQ+ population. In one of the class sessions, one of Sierra's classmates shares how they may find it difficult to work with LGBTQ+ clients because of their personal religious beliefs. The classmate knows Sierra uses "they/them" pronouns but refuses to use them when discussing in class with Sierra because they believe "God created people as they are, we don't get to change that." The classmate additionally makes the comment, "I know Sierra's *preferred* pronouns are 'they/them', but *she* is clearly a 'she'." Dr. Timms facilitates a challenging discussion on the ethical implications of this (e.g., imposing personal beliefs, terminology) and refers the classmate to the APA standards and other competency documents related to the importance of using a person's identified pronouns. He also explains how the phrase "*preferred* pronouns" is not encouraged because it implies that a person can choose their gender, as explained in the APA manual (p. 140). Dr. Timms is also then able to have a private discussion with the classmate about dispositional concerns related to language use and an additional conversation with both Sierra and

the classmate about the emotional impact of the classmates' words and how this discussion relates to their work with clients.

Conclusion

Language use is a dynamic process in communication that is fluid and not fixed. Therefore, language always changes (points to continuing education and exposure to diversity), and the change requires an ongoing reflection and evaluation for appropriate usage in a sociocultural and sociopolitical context. Furthermore, how language is used in professional or academic environments can be instrumental in promoting relational dynamics between individuals (e.g., between counselor educator and counseling student or between client and counselor). Therefore, in addition to the use of bias-free language, the intentional use of culturally inclusive language in the various professional roles of counselor educators, such as teaching, research and scholarship, and advocacy and leadership to list a few, is paramount for a variety of reasons.

In the context of this manuscript, we focused on the use of culturally informed and inclusive language in the selective professional roles many counselor educators serve, while minimally addressing those of practitioners such as counselors due to the limited space. However, it is noteworthy that the impact of the use of culturally inclusive language by counselor educators goes beyond their immediate professional roles (e.g., teaching, supervision, research), given the counseling students whom they teach and the clients they serve will be indirectly influenced.

In using culturally inclusive language, alongside the significance of fluidity and change of language use, the topics and the description of characteristics/groups are also important to consider over time. Furthermore, the appropriate representation of marginalized social groups using inclusive language is imperative. People from these groups recognize and understand they are not being discussed, and it is important for us to continually push for understanding this and who these

individuals/groups are. It is recommended that future counseling research invests more in these areas. As one example, it would be helpful to explore how the counseling process would be impacted by culturally informed and inclusive counseling practice particularly using bias-free and culturally inclusive language.

Despite the extensive updates to the APA Publication Manual, we found a few areas were still lacking. For example, some cultural aspects are not included but should be, such as consideration of language related to religion and spirituality. The APA Publication Manual excludes any discussion concerning reducing biased language related to this area.

Religion & Spirituality

This missing component is consistent with research, demonstrating that many students receive minimal exposure to these topics in counselor education programs (Adams et al., 2015; Dobmeier & Reiner, 2012). This is mostly attributed to faculty's uncertainty regarding relevance, personal interest, or not having a firm understanding of the topic. Although insight is not given by APA related to decision-making regarding identities included or omitted from the chapter, discussing the implications of religion and spirituality is integral to approaching client conceptualization from an intersectional framework. Earlier in this manuscript, we discussed competencies created by various divisions of ACA. Another competency created by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) focuses on addressing religion and spirituality in counseling. These competencies are designed to be used along with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) to better understand the culture and worldview of clients and help counselors explore their self-awareness (ASERVIC, 2009). The need for this to be incorporated into the APA Publication Manual is evident. For example, according to the Pew Research Center (2015), 70.6% of Americans identify as “Christian” while 5.9% identify as “Non-

Christian Faiths.” It is important to note that this is the language utilized by Pew Research Center. Reporting the totality of other religious/faith-based groups as “Non-Christian” is perpetuating biased language by classifying faiths and/or practices such as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu in opposition to the dominant faith (similar to outdated use of phrases such as “non-White concerns” in the area of race). This is just one example to illustrate the importance of having a religion and spirituality section in the APA Publication Manual to help guide counselor educators with reducing biased language.

Limitations

Despite the significance of this manuscript supporting the use of non-biased language and culturally inclusive language in counseling and counselor education, there are a few limitations. Although we have written the manuscript with an extensive literature review and subsequent, meaningful synthesis pertaining to the relevance and applicability of the topic in counselor education, it is more conceptual than scientific. Thus, we recommend that future research involve a systematic process of scientific inquiry to explore and/or examine the impact of both non-biased language and culturally inclusive language in counselor education and counseling.

We also questioned the potential differences in understanding and philosophy surrounding bias-free language and its use between the counseling profession and psychology. For example, does language and guidance on its use change based on the discipline and/or field? This relates to a longstanding question of why the counseling profession (and/or other social sciences) use APA as the writing/language standard, rather than one by their own design. This consideration is beyond the scope of this article, but we felt it was important to consider in future work.

References

- Adams, C. M., Puig, A., Baggs, A., & Wolf, C. P. (2015). Integrating religion and spirituality into counselor education: Barriers and strategies. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 54(1), 44-56. <https://doi-org.auth.lib.niu.edu/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2015.00069.x>
- ALGBTIC LGBTQIA Competencies Task Force. (2013). Association for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in counseling competencies for counseling with lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and ally individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(1), 2-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2013.755444>
- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. <https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>
- American Psychological Association. (2022). *History of APA's journal article reporting standards*. <https://apastyle.apa.org/jars/history>
- American Psychological Association. (2020a). *Equity, diversity, and inclusion in APA journals*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/authors/equity-diversity-inclusion>
- American Psychological Association. (2020b). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th ed.)*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>
- American Psychological Association. (2019). *Bias-free language*. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association, Task Force on Issues of Sexual Bias in Graduate Education. (1975). Guidelines for nonsexist use of language. *American Psychologist*, 30(6), 682-684. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076869>
- Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling. (2009). *Competencies for counseling with transgender clients*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling. (2009). *Competencies for addressing spiritual and religious issues in counseling*. <https://aservic.org/spiritual-and-religious-competencies/>
- Ayubi, E. (2019). *Hear, hear! It's finally here! APA Style*. American Psychological Association. <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/new-edition-here>
- Bentley, M., Peerenboom, C. A., Hodge, F. W., Passano, E. B., Warren, H. C., & Washburn, M. F. (1929). Instructions in regard to preparation of manuscript. *Psychological Bulletin*, 26(2), 57-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0071487>
- Breitenbach, A. (2016). *The origins of APA style*. American Psychological Association. <https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2016/07/the-origins-of-apa-style.html>
- Canady, V. A. (2021). APA on MLK Day apologizes for its role in structural racism in psychiatry. *Mental Health Weekly*, 31(4), 1-3.
- Chapin, M., McCarthy, H., Shaw, L., Bradham-Cousar, M., Chapman, R., Nosek, M., Peterson, S., Yilmaz, Z., & Ysasi, N. (2018). *Disability-related counseling competencies*. American Rehabilitation Counseling Association.
- The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2021). *CACREP 2024 standards draft 2*. <https://www.cacrep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/DRAFT-2-OCTOBER-2021.pdf>

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039>
- Delphin-Rittmon, M. E., Flanagan, E. H., Andres-Hyman, R., Ortiz, J., Amer, M. M., & Davidson, L. (2015). Racial-ethnic differences in access, diagnosis, and outcomes in public-sector inpatient mental health treatment. *Psychological Services*, 12(2), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038858>
- Dobmeier, R. A., & Reiner, S. M. (2012). Spirituality in the counselor education curriculum: A national survey of student perceptions. *Counseling and Values*, 57(1), 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.2012.00008.x>
- Dorland, J. M., & Fischer, A. R. (2001). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals' perceptions: An analogue study. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 29(4), 532-547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00110000011294004>
- Garretson, D. J. (1993). Psychological misdiagnosis of African Americans. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*.
- Granello, D. G., & Gorby, S. R. (2021). It's time for counselors to modify our language: It matters when we call our clients schizophrenics versus people. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 99(4), 452-461. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12397>
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Longman.
- Fivush, R. (2010). Speaking silence: The social construction of silence in autobiographical and cultural narratives. *Memory*, 18(2), 88-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658210903029404>
- Harrison, C., & Tanner, K. D. (2018). Language matters: Considering microaggressions in science. *CBE - Life Sciences education*, 17(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.18-01-0011>
- Kenney, K. R., Kenney, M. E., Alvarado, S. B., Baden, A. L., Brew, L., Chen-Hayes, S., Crippen, C. L., Harris, H. L., Henriksen, Jr., R. C., Malott, K. M., Paladino, D. A., Pope, M. L., Salazar, C. F., & Singh, A. A. (2015). *Competencies for counseling the multiracial population*. American Counseling Association.
- Krishnamurthy, R. (1996). Ethnic, racial and tribal: The language of racism? In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard & M. Coulthard (Eds.), *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis*. Routledge.
- Liang, J., Matheson, B. E., & Douglas, J. M. (2016). Mental health diagnostic considerations in racial/ethnic minority youth. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 25(6), 1926-1940.
- Mertens, D. M. (2010). Transformative mixed methods research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 469-474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410364612>
- Noble, N., Bradley, L., & Hendricks, B. (2020). Advocacy for couples and families: New directions APA publication manual (7th edition). *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 28(3), 225-228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480720929690>
- Noble, N., Bradley, L., & Hendricks, B. (2021). Bias-free language: LGBTQ + clients and the new APA manual. *Journal of LGBTQ Issues in Counseling*, 15(1), 128-139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2021.1868377>
- Öksüz, E. E., & Brubaker, M. D. (2020). Deconstructing disability training in counseling: A critical examination and call to the profession. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy*, 7(2), 163-175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2326716X.2020.1820407>

- Pew Research Center. (2015). *Religious landscape study*. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>
- Ratts, M. J., Singh, A. A., Nassar-McMillan, S., Butler, S. K., & McCullough, J. R. (2016). Multicultural and social justice counseling competencies: Guidelines for the counseling profession. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 44*(1), 28-48. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12035>
- Rossi, A. L., & Lopez, E. J. (2017). Contextualizing competence: Language and LGBT-based competency in health care. *Journal of Homosexuality, 64*(10), 1330-1349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2017.1321361>
- Scharrón-del Río, A. R., & Aja, A. A. (2020). *Latinx*: Inclusive language as liberation praxis. *Journal of Latinx Psychology, 8*(1), 7-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/lat0000140>
- Singh, A., Nassar, S., Arredondo, P., & Toporek, R. (2020). The Past Guides the Future: Implementing the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 98*(3), 238–252. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12319>
- Sotto-Santiago, S. (2019). Time to reconsider the word minority in academic medicine. *Journal of Best Practices in Health Professions Diversity, 12*(1), 72-78 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26894228>
- Stewart, D. L. (2013). Racially minoritized students at U.S. four-year institutions. *The Journal of Negro Education, 82*(2), 184–197. <https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.82.2.0184>
- Torres Rivera, E., West-Olatunji, C., Conwill, W., Garrett, M. T., & Phan, L. T. (2008). Language as a form of subtle oppression among linguistically different people in the United States of America. *Social Perspectives, 10*(1), 11-28.
- VandenBos, G. R. (1992). The APA knowledge dissemination program: An overview of 100 years. In R. B. Evans, V. S. Sexton, & T. C. Cadwallader (Eds.), *The American Psychological Association: A historical perspective* (p. 347–390). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10111-012>
- Vera, E., & Speight, S. (2003). Multicultural competence, social Justice, and counseling psychology: Expanding our roles. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*(3), 253–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000003031003001>