

Social and Cultural Diversity Analysis

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The role of a counselor takes years of education, thousands of hours of supervised training, and successful completion of licensure exams. These steps allow counselors to practice unsupervised if they are certified and competent in their specific areas of counseling. Consequently, it is imperative for all counselors to actively strive for multicultural competence. This paper explores topics including cultural diversity, self-assessment of personal values and biases, the comprehension of subtle racism concepts, and the development of multicultural growth and competence.

Personal History of Discrimination

Cultural diversity is everywhere and extends beyond ethnic backgrounds to encompass gender identity, religion, sexual preference, age, language, and socioeconomic status. Every individual has personal biases and values that have been learned from childhood. As a Counselor in Training (CIT), I acknowledge a bias against certain religions and individuals who appear overly reliant on their faith to the extent that their independent thinking is compromised. It is crucial, in counseling, not to impose one's beliefs and values onto others (ACA, 2014). In addition to religion, I know how it feels to be judged based on ethnicity.

Beyond religious biases, I have experienced the impact of judgments based on ethnicity. During high school, a new principal accused me of being a gang member due to an art class drawing. I was appalled and couldn't believe the accusation, as this person didn't know me and my character. I clarified that I was a high school athlete, and the cartoon (depicting a basketball player) was a gesture of victory, not a gang sign. It wasn't until my teachers and coaches came to

my defense that he let it go. I realized that if my name weren't Latin, I would have never been called into the office and accused of being a gang member.

Navigating cultural diversity and racism poses challenges, as individuals may be eager to learn about other races but fear unintentionally offending someone. For instance, I have numerous Asian friends, including my boss, yet I am unsure of their specific nationalities (Chinese, Korean, or Vietnamese). Although open discussion about cultural backgrounds should be encouraged, my lack of awareness hinders me from asking questions that could be perceived as offensive. Therefore, my conversations are only surface level, and I don't pursue a deeper conversation about their background.

These life encounters have heightened my awareness of the ease with which individuals are often judged based on their cultural diversity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual identity or preference, and age. It also taught me how judgments can be wrong and usually based on a lack of knowledge. As a female of Spanish-Italian-Mexican descent, my unique background equips me with diverse worldviews and experiences, fostering my ability to understand and embrace individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Reflection of Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination are not scientific and, therefore, derived from people in society to gain stature over others; no one is born racist (Weir, 2023). Racism can be overtly utilized for a purpose or mentioned unconsciously by someone unaware, also known as subtle racism (Liao et al., 2016). An example of subtle racism is when people use microaggressions toward others, such as telling someone that they speak good English or that they don't see color

(Sue et al., 2022). These words themselves point out that they're different based on ethnicity, or they choose not to acknowledge their culture.

Racism and discrimination can manifest even within the confines of the same culture. For instance, a Hispanic person that does not speak Spanish may be labeled as a white Hispanic or gringo. Additionally, variations in cultural perspectives across different generations can lead to shifts in traditions, values, and beliefs. For instance, older generations, like grandparents, may have been exposed to racism in their upbringing, whereas their grandchildren may not share the same experiences. The evolution of society and the changing dynamics across generations contribute to shifts in racism and discrimination.

Applying Ethics and Cultural Identity

Counselors follow a code of ethics published by the American Counseling Association. When counseling culturally diverse clients, counselors must be aware of their personal beliefs and values and not impose those on their clients, section A.4.b. imposing values (ACA, 2014). In addition, counselors must never discriminate against a client based on race, religion, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, section C.5. nondiscrimination (ACA, 2014). Moreover, counselors understand that culture may affect the presenting problem and its perception, section E.5.b, cultural sensitivity (ACA, 2014). Finally, counselors will utilize culturally appropriate assessment tools and create treatment plans based on a proper perspective and assessment, section E.8. Multicultural issues and diversity in assessment (ACA, 2014).

Cultural sensitivity is crucial when working with clients to help build rapport, gather information, assess, and collaborate on a treatment plan. Evidence-based tools such as cultural formulation interview protocols (CIF) are helpful as counselors can customize the questions to fit

the unique diversities, gather in-depth information from the client, and eliminate errors based on bias (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The CIF interview protocol can cover topics such as social stressors, coping skills, and levels of functioning, to name a few. Research has shown that when working with a client where race plays a part in the presenting problem, identifying and highlighting strengths within the culture is more beneficial than the color-blind approach, which ignores cultural diversity (Ahmad et al., 2019). In addition to CIF, narrative therapy is helpful when working with a diverse client. The narrative therapy modality allows clients to tell their stories based on their culture and world experiences (Chope & Consoli, 2007).

The role of the counselor is to be open-minded and provide a non-judgmental space for the client to share their presenting issues. If the counselor can build rapport and trust with the client, they will share information to help create goals and a treatment plan. To be multiculturally competent, a counselor must continue to learn about cultural diversity and build a relationship with the client to ask questions about their diversity, learn from the client, and check in for feedback to ensure the goals and treatment plan are still aligned. As a CIT, I plan to continue researching and taking continuous education classes regarding multicultural diversity. After all, no matter what focus of interest a counselor works in, they will have culturally diverse clients.

Conclusion

Social and cultural diversity makes the world go around and creates unique individuals and traditions. Recognizing that each person possesses values and biases shaped by their cultural background and life experiences is crucial. Importantly, these biases and values need not necessarily be negative; instead, they present opportunities for fostering a deeper understanding of multiculturalism. Counselors can utilize tools such as CIF to garner information and limit

errors based on bias. Moreover, by following the ACA code of ethics, they can learn to be culturally sensitive and utilize the correct assessment and treatment plan. Furthermore, counselors can undergo personal growth by maintaining an open mind and continuously educating themselves on multicultural diversity.

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