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## Counselors' Multicultural Competencies: Race, Training, Ethnic Identity, and Color-Blind Racial Attitudes

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Multicultural counseling competence comprises counselors' knowledge and awareness of various skills with which to serve ethnic minority clients. Such competence is crucial in view of (a) today's increase in ethnic minority populations, (b) such competence being a key contributing factor to satisfaction among a vast majority of ethnic minority clients, and (c) the principles of such competence being in compliance with ACA ethical guidelines.

What variables could be relevant to multicultural competence? Researchers reported that ethnic minority trainees scored higher in multicultural competence measurements than Whites, and multicultural training was found positively related to multicultural counseling awareness, knowledge, and skills. Multicultural training includes courses, research, and workshops. For example, Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings, and Nielson (1995) reported that multicultural courses were related to MCI-Knowledge and MCI-Awareness, and workshops were related to MCI-Awareness.

*Ethnic identity* is one's set of ideals, values, behaviors, and attitudes within a specific social group that typifies one's identity. Although some people take ethnic identity as synonymous with racial identity, they differ. Helms (1990) said that identity models can be considered racial models when they describe reactions to racial oppression or domination based on racial physical characteristics. In contrast, ethnic identity is broader in scope than reactions to racial oppression. Phinney (1992) listed three features of ethnic identity: (1) sense of belonging to a specific group, (2) exploration of the role of ethnicity in individuals' lives, and (3) acquiring and continuously maintaining of individuals' cultural characteristics.

In addition to difference in meanings of *racial* and *ethnic*, both differ also in reception of the amount of scholars' research. Although many researchers have investigated how White racial identity positively relates to multicultural competence, not much research has been done on ethnic identity. Higher ethnic identity may show greater self-awareness, which is one component

of multicultural competence. Due to its importance, the present study included ethnic identity.

*Color-blind racial attitudes* means unawareness of racial dynamics (i.e., believing that racism does not exist), and of White privilege and institutional discrimination. Such attitudes do not always imply racial superiority but can also mean just being unaware of the existence of racism. Color-blind racial attitudes have three components: unawareness of racial privileges, institutional discrimination, and blatant racial issues. *Unawareness of racial privileges* refers to blindness to White privileges. *Unawareness of institutional discrimination* refers to a limited unawareness of institutional forms of discrimination. *Unawareness of blatant racial issues* indicates a denial of general and pervasive racial discrimination.

Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, and Browne (2000) pointed out a potential existence of the relationship between color-blind racial attitudes and multicultural competence. For example, the notion of color-blind racial attitudes is theoretically consistent with components of multicultural competence measures. Both Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) and MCC measurements evaluate one's knowledge about the existence of racism. Because of their theoretical relationship, the present study included color-blind racial attitudes as a variable.

### Purposes of the Study

The present study aimed at exploring the relation between multicultural counseling competence and (a) counselors' race, (b) multicultural training, (c) ethnic identity, and (d) color-blind racial blind attitude.

### Methods

#### *Participants*

Potential participants were selected from (a) American Psychological Association and American Counseling Association division listservs and (b)

graduate programs in counselor education and counseling psychology.

The 338 participants were between ages 24 and 51, with 279 females and 59 males. As for their racial distribution, most (68%) were White American ( $n = 231$ ); 32% were racial/ethnic minorities such as Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $n = 26$ ), African American or Black ( $n = 27$ ), Latino(a) ( $n = 34$ ), and Native American ( $n = 20$ ). The number of multicultural courses ranged from 0 to 4 ( $M = 1.56$ ); multicultural research projects ranged from 0 to 9 ( $M = 2.21$ ); and multicultural workshops ranged 0-12 ( $M = 3.52$ ).

### *Instruments*

1. *Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale* (MCKAS; Ponterotto, Gretchen, Utsey, Riger, & Austin, 2002). The MCKAS is made of 32 items to assess self-reported multicultural counseling knowledge and awareness. The MCKAS uses a 7-point Likert scale of 1 to 7, higher scores indicating greater perceived knowledge and awareness of multicultural counseling issues. Scale scores are calculated by adding items in each subscale, higher scores showing greater self-assessed competence in respective areas. The MCKAS appears to have good content, construct, and criterion-related validity. Ponterotto et al. (2002) reported that the intercorrelation between the two subscales was .04. The convergent and criterion-related validity of MCKAS was examined by an analysis of the correlation of MCI and MEIM.
2. *Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding* (BIDR; Paulhus, 1991). The BIDR measures self-deceptive positive enhancement and impression management. The BIDR items use a 7-point Likert scale of 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating greater positively biased self-reports and impression management.
3. *The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure* (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). MEIM is a 12-item scale to measure ethnic identity awareness with a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Total scores of MEIM can range from 12 to 70, with higher scores showing greater identity awareness and commitment. The MEIM has a reliability of .90 among college students (Phinney, 1992).
4. *Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale* (CoBRAS; Neville et al., 2000). The CoBRAS is designed to assess “cognitive

dimensions of color-blind racial attitudes.” It consists of 20 items to assess color-blind racial attitudes with a 6-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores show greater levels of blindness or unawareness. The CoBRAS includes blindness to three areas: Racial Privileges, Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Racial Issues. The Racial Privilege subscale measures blindness to the existence of White privileges. The Institutional Discrimination subscale measures limited awareness of the implications of institutional discrimination and exclusion. The Blatant Racial Issues subscale measures unawareness of general and pervasive racial discrimination. Neville et al. (2000) reported that the coefficient alpha for the total scale was .91.

5. *Demographic Questionnaire*. Participants gave information on their ethnicity, gender, age, academic degrees, multicultural training (e.g., number of multicultural courses taken, multicultural research activities, and workshops participated/conducted).

### **Procedure**

An e-mail message announced the study to APA and ACA divisions and several nationwide graduate programs in counseling psychology and counseling. Those who agreed with the informed consent statement were directed to the survey page that included the four instruments and the demographic questionnaire/information form.

### *Analysis of Data*

The present study conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to analyze data, with MCKAS full-scale as the criterion variables; hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict MCKAS total scale score and subscale scores.

In the first step, social desirability (measured by BIDR) was entered. In the second step, counselor's race was entered, for which the five groups—White, Asian, Black, Latino, and Native American—were entered with four dummy codes. The White group was always coded zero, functioning as the constant. In the third step, multicultural training variables of number of courses, number of research projects, and number of workshops were entered. In the fourth step, ethnic identity (measured by MEIM) was entered. In the fifth step, color-blind racial attitudes (measured by CoBRAS) were entered.

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the results of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting the MCKAS. Counselors' race, multicultural training (e.g., courses, workshop, research), ethnic identity, and color-blind racial attitudes as a whole were variables found to contribute significant variance to multicultural competence as measured by MCKAS, total  $R^2 = .52$ .

**Table 1.**  
**Results of Hierarchical Regressions of the MCKAS Full-Scale on Predictor Variables**

Variable	$\beta$	t	$R^2$ Change	F Change
Social Desirability				
BIDR	.00	.06	.00	.00
Race				
Asian	.10	1.60		
Black	.18	2.96**		
Latino	.14	2.26*		
American Native	.15	2.46*		
			.06	4.30**
Multicultural Training				
Courses	.14	2.32*		
Research	.09	1.30		
Workshops	.16	2.34*		
			.07	5.40***
Ethnic Identity				
MEIM	.34	5.49***	.10	30.18***
Color-Blind Racial Attitudes				
Racial Privilege	-.33	-5.23***		
Discrimination	-.18	-2.73**		
Blatant Racial Issues	-.19	-3.11**		
			.29	50.90***

Note.  $N = 338$ . BIDR = Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding; MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure. Total  $R^2 = .52$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Social desirability was not found to contribute to the variance of MCKAS full scale, general multicultural competence. At the second step, added to social desirability, race was found to contribute to the significant variance of multicultural competence,  $F(4, 329)$  change = 4.30,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ , with  $R^2$  change = .06. Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans in comparison with Whites were each significantly different, but Asians were not significantly different from Whites. At the third step, multicultural training, added to social desirability and race/ethnicity, explained additional significant variance,  $R^2$  change = .07,  $F(4, 328)$  change = 5.40,  $p < .001$ , which is a large effect size. Number of multicultural courses and multicultural

workshops each made a significant contribution to the MCKAS, but not the number of research projects. At the fourth step, ethnic identity, added to social desirability, race, and multicultural training, contributed to the additional significant variance,  $R^2$  change = .10,  $F(1, 327) = 30.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is a large effect size. At the fifth step, three subscales of CoBRAS (Unawareness of Racial Privileges, Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Racial Issues), added to social desirability, race, multicultural training, and ethnic identity, together explained additional significant variance,  $R^2$  change = .29,  $F(1, 326) = 21.24$ ,  $p < .001$ , which is a large effect size.

## Discussion

The present study has investigated how the five predictor variables—social desirability, counselor race, multicultural training, ethnic identity, and color-blind racial attitudes—influence multicultural counseling competence, as measured by the Multicultural Counseling Knowledge and Awareness Scale. The present research, which used multiple regression analysis, found race, multicultural training, ethnic identity, and color-blind racial attitudes to significantly contribute to the variance of multicultural competence. Multicultural workshops, ethnic identity, and racial attitudes were found significantly related to multicultural awareness.

Although social desirability was noted as a confounding variable in self-reported multicultural competence, the present study found such desirability not associated with the MCKAS. Ponterotto et al. (2002) eliminated three items due to their correlation with social desirability while designing MCKAS.

Multicultural training was found to significantly contribute to MCKAS-Full Scale. This finding suggested the importance of multicultural training in didactic format, research, and experiential learning. In addition to formal course work, the findings indicated that workshop was a strong predictor among three trainings (courses, research, and workshops), all of which may have effectively enhanced knowledge and awareness of multicultural competence. In fact, Neville et al. (1996) found that counselor trainees appreciated the varied ingredients in their multicultural courses, and guest speakers with perceptive perspectives to provoke further sensitized cultural experiences.

These findings about multicultural training have an enormous implication for future multicultural training. Students may benefit from varied trainings (more than from mere didactic instruction) that maximize their effects by exposing concepts to varieties of research, short-term workshops, and cultural

dialogues. Such exposure increases acquaintance with different cultures.

The present research found ethnic identity significantly related to MCKAS-full scale. Higher scores of ethnic identity in MEIM related to higher scores in multicultural competence, including cultural knowledge and awareness. Here are two possible reasons: First, knowing one's ethnic identity is also one aspect of self-awareness, that is, one of the multicultural competencies. Not surprisingly, despite more than 200 Caucasian White participants in the present study, greater ethnic identity development was found related to greater multicultural counseling competence, that is, White counselors with high ethnic identity awareness may have strong multicultural counseling competence. Second, ethnic identity includes feelings of ethnic belonging and pride, a secure sense of group membership, and a positive attitude toward one's group membership, which may be a foundation to knowledge and awareness of cultural differences between counselors and clients.

Neville et al. (2000) said, "color-blind racial attitudes are a relatively undeveloped area in the field of psychology," not attended to as part of multicultural counseling competence. The present study has three findings. *One*, color-blind racial attitudes were found significantly negatively related to MCKAS-full scale, Knowledge Subscale, and Awareness Subscale. Higher scores of color-blind racial attitudes were found related to lower scores of multicultural competence. *Two*, color-blind racial attitudes were found negatively related to social desirability and ethnic identity. *Three*, color-blind racial attitudes include blindness to three subscales—White privileges, Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Racial Issues. Higher scores of unawareness of White privileges indicated the greater unawareness of privileges, and showed lower scores of MCKAS; the same applied to Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Issues.

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