

Visibility of Whiteness: Analyzing White Privilege among Female

Counseling Trainees

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INTRODUCTION

- ~ Interracial dialogues about racial issues are often accompanied by anger, anxiety and guilt.
- ~ The notion of Whiteness as a privileged status frequently provokes strong negative affect and denial in White persons (Sue, David Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, & Torino, 2010; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008).
- ~ Prior efforts to promote racial sensitivity in counseling trainees have focused on exposure to information on diversity and multiculturalism, however, McClelland and Linnander (2006) found that interpersonal contact is an important factor in changing racial attitudes among White counseling trainees.
- ~ Soble, Spanierman, and Liao (2011) also advocate that White students be encouraged and empowered to process their emotional responses to racism.

PURPOSE

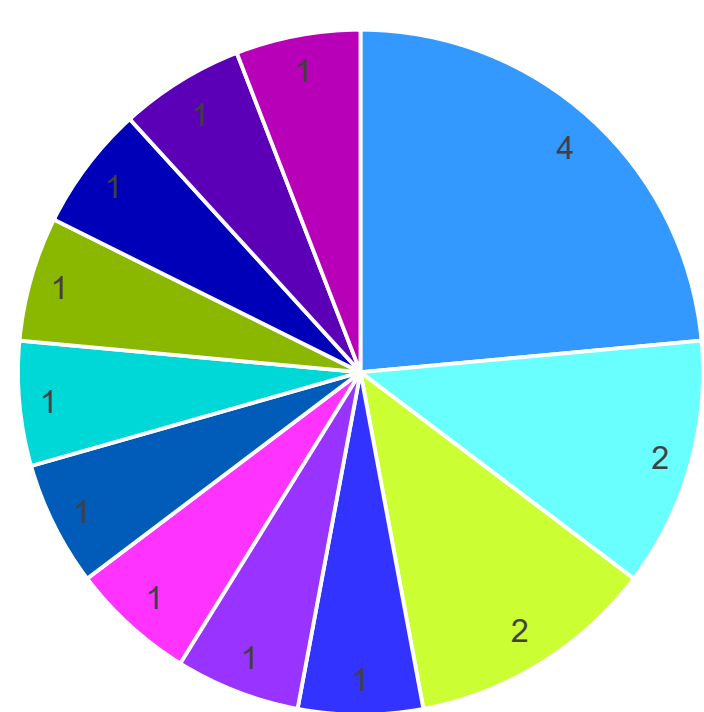
The current study sought to examine white female counseling trainees' written reflections following a personal one-on-one dialogue with culturally different interviewees.

Sample Characteristics

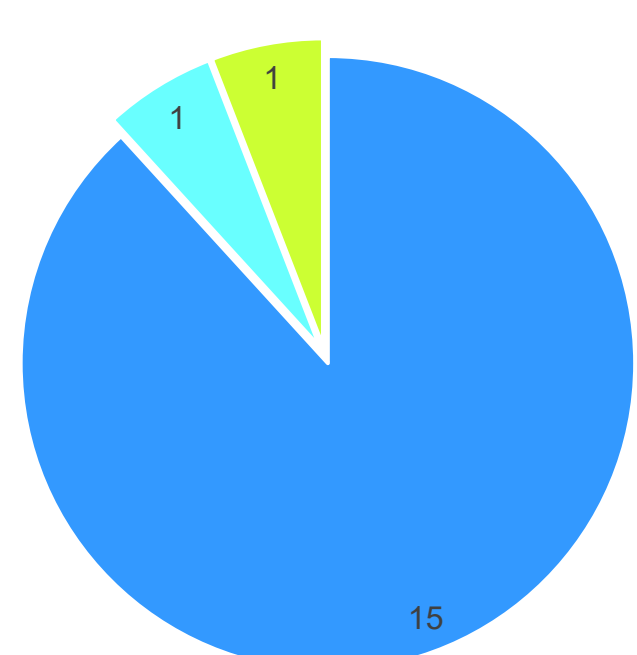
- ~ N = 17 White females, from 6 cohorts
- ~ Age Range = 23-45, Mean = 29.94

Who did participants interview?

- African American, Female
- African American, Male
- Immigrant from India, Female
- Immigrant from India, Male
- Immigrant from Brazil, Male
- Immigrant from Lebanon, Male
- Immigrant from Vietnam, Male
- Lesbian Female



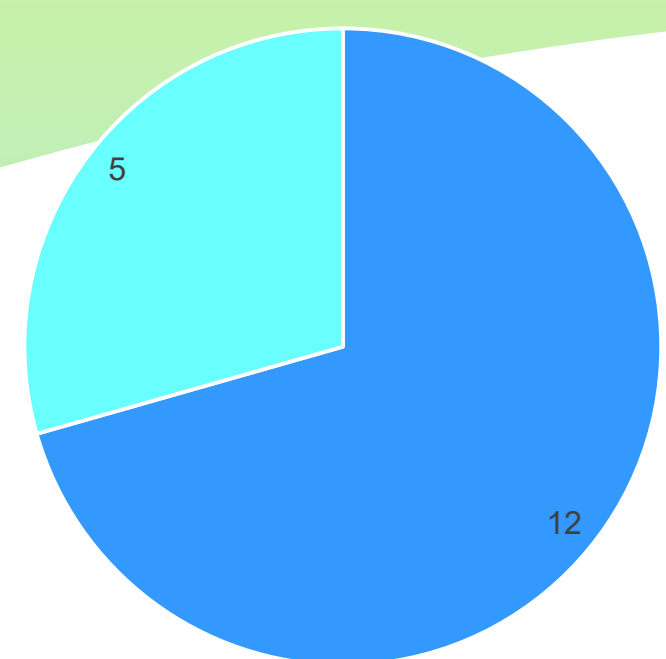
Participants' Country of Origin



- USA
- England
- Russia

Participants' Religion

- Christian



METHOD

Research Paradigm and Data Analysis

- ~ Constructivist theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) assumes that different realities exist as constructions in the minds of individuals.
- ~ Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR; Hill et al., 1997, 2005) as methodology is an analysis that focuses on the consensus of the research team's identification of themes and categories.

Procedure

- ~ All participants were enrolled in a graduate course on multicultural issues from 6 different cohorts and were asked to conduct face-to-face interviews with people who came from a background different from their own. They were then given the task of writing unstructured narratives about their interview experiences.
- ~ The authors analyzed 17 reflection essays written by White female counseling graduate students on their interviews with people who came from a background different from their own.
- ~ The research team was composed of one Filipino-American counseling psychologist, four counseling graduate students and one psychology undergraduate student.

Research Questions

What did White counselors-in-training reflect about in their essays?

What is the process of change that occurs in this reflection?

"Like me, family is very important to Cameron, although our experiences with family have been very different. Cameron's extended family was very involved in his childhood." "While I am very close with my family, immediate and extended, most of my extended family lives far away so I only see them on holidays." "One very big difference between our family lives is that Cameron did not meet his father until he was five and even after that they were never close." [Charlotte a 24-year-old White female interviewed a 23-year-old African American man, 2C]

"I grew up in an extremely white town, where there were at most four minority families." "Coming from an all white community to such a mixture of cultures [at college] was a huge culture shock for me." [Geraldine, a 25-year-old White female interviewed a 26-year old African American man, 1A]

"Although I can cognitively understand that I, as a white person, step into a world that is mine, surrounded by images of people like me with faces like mine, I can never fully understand what it feels like to not have that. I am sure with more exposure to people of different races than myself and being open to talking about different issues, I will continue to learn more about what it means to be a minority, what it means to be white and what it means to be human." [JC Matt, a 23-year old White female interviewed a 43-year-old Indian woman, 4C]

RESULTS

Domains and Categories	Classification	No.
1. Whiteness was "limiting" and resulted in their personal biases		
A. It was limiting to grow up in a homogeneous environment.	Typical	10
B. Admitted ignorance/bias regarding lives of those who were culturally different.	Typical	9
2. White privilege and racism are experienced differently depending on other social group memberships one holds		
A. Color of skin	Variant	4
B. Gender	Variant	3
C. Family background/values	Variant	6
D. Educational level	Typical	10
E. Religious, cultural values	Typical	9
F. SES, and their access to resources	Variant	5
3. Heightened awareness of their emotional responses		
A. Shock	Variant	4
B. Disbelief of racism	Rare	1
C. Sadness	Variant	5
D. Discomfort about inability to empathize	Variant	8
E. Empathy	Variant	4
F. Gratitude and fascination	Typical	13
G. Amazement of life stories	Variant	7
4. Owning White Privilege		
A. Own privilege and power due to their whiteness, the benefits they enjoyed	Typical	13
B. Identify ways they could keep improving their multicultural skills	Typical	9
C. Had a deeper understanding of what it is like to be a minority	Typical	12

Note. Classification/frequency of mention of a category:
 General: almost all p's, 16-17
 Typical: more than half of p's, 9-15
 Variant: mentioned occasionally, 3-8
 Rarely: 1-2 p's mentioned it

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

- ~ The most frequently verbalized themes in participants' narratives were acknowledging the privileges associated with whiteness, awareness of what it means to be denied these privileges and greater determination to develop skills needed to be more effective with racially diverse clients.
- ~ Largely through their face-to-face encounters with "the other," our counseling trainees were able to acknowledge the power inherent in being white.
- ~ This acknowledgement was integrally linked to developing a deeper understanding and empathy towards persons of color and a stronger commitment to developing multicultural counseling competencies.
- ~ These results further support what previous studies have found: that interactions (Tomlinson-Clarke, 2000), experiential coursework, and cross-cultural interactions (Coleman, 2006) or field experience (Brown, 2004), coupled with self-examination are the critical incidents for change in MCT.

Conclusion

Essentially, the process starts with White counselors-in-training choosing someone to interview who they know very little about, someone they consider meaningfully different from themselves. Then, counselors-in-training reflect on the similarities or differences they share with this person, become aware of their own emotional reactions to their interviewee, and come to realizations about themselves. Trainees understand White privileges, power, and cultural rights they have grown up with, recognize the biases and prejudices they have had, experience empathy or experience themselves struggling to empathize, and identify the specific ways by which they can better serve, respect, appreciate, and celebrate the other. In essence, this process of trainees becoming multiculturally adept inevitably includes active personal transformation—being meaningfully engaged and responsible for their own growth.

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