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Awareness of White Privilege Among White Counseling Trainees

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In this study, the written reactions of 34 White master's counseling students to a list developed by Peggy McIntosh describing her experience of White privilege were analyzed using qualitative methodology. Three general themes and corresponding subthemes were identified and revealed varied levels of awareness of White privilege. The three general themes represent increasing levels of awareness, from none, to demonstrated awareness but unwillingness to engage in proaction, to a more profound awareness of privilege and proactive efforts to eradicate privilege. Directions for future research and training are presented.

The relationship between White privilege and unequal power relations has remained relatively unacknowledged in the counseling and psychology literature (Phoenix, 1997; Thompson & Neville, 1999). Systems of privilege operate in the workplace, housing, media, and the legal system to perpetuate inequities for some and unearned advantages and opportunities for others (Swigonski, 1999; Wildman, 1996). Several authors have discussed the unearned benefits associated with systemic White privilege, including membership in the norm (Wildman, 1996), feelings of superiority (Ostrander, 1984), and the power to ignore race or object to the system of privilege (Wildman, 1996). The privileges associated with whiteness are often unexamined and unarticulated by those who benefit; White privilege is viewed as natural (Crosby, 1997; Ostrander, 1984; Roediger, 1991) and maintained through the processes of denial, the belief in the superiority of Whites, and the notion of meritocracy (Hurtado & Stewart, 1997).

Several authors have argued that the pervasiveness of White privilege, related ethnocentrism, and unintentional racism in the counseling and psychology professions impedes progress toward developing multicultural competencies (Bulhan, 1985; M. B. Ivey, Ivey, D'Andrea, & Daniels, 1997). Given that the majority of counseling and psychology graduate students and

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mental health professionals are White, examining trainees' awareness and understanding of White privilege seems warranted. Such information could be used to design training programs and facilitate the development of multicultural counseling competence in White trainees.

Several key documents in the field of multicultural counseling, such as the Division 17 cross-cultural counseling competencies (Sue et al., 1982) and subsequent refinement and operationalization by the Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992), focus on the importance of counselor self-awareness. Self-awareness, or exploration of oneself, is often viewed as a prerequisite to achieving accurate empathy with culturally diverse clients and developing a positive multicultural counseling relationship (Ancis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2000; Carter, 1991; Sadowsky, Kuo-Jackson, & Loya, 1997; Sue et al., 1992). Similarly, Divisions 17, 35, and 45 of the American Psychological Association have endorsed guidelines related to culturally competent psychological practice. These guidelines address the importance of psychologists' developing awareness of personal biases that may adversely affect service delivery (Fouad, 1999; A. E. Ivey, Fouad, Arredondo, & D'Andrea, 1999). For White counselors, self-awareness includes acknowledging their own racist attitudes and beliefs and understanding "how they may have directly or indirectly benefited from individual, institutional, and cultural racism" (Sue et al., 1992, p. 482).

Although self-awareness has been identified as a fundamental component of cultural competence (American Psychological Association, 1993), multicultural counseling coursework and psychology texts tend to focus on knowledge or information about culturally diverse groups (Reynolds, 1995). Limited attention has been paid to fostering trainees' racial, ethnic, and cultural self-awareness (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989; McRae & Johnson, 1991; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). The lack of significant focus on developing racial self-awareness in counseling and psychology training programs parallels the perpetuation of White culture as the norm in the psychology profession (Bulhan, 1985; Thomas & Sillen, 1972).

Although research specifically focusing on counseling and psychology students' awareness of White privilege has not been conducted, research on racial identity has significantly contributed to an understanding of how individuals process racial stimuli. Models of White racial identity (e.g., Carney & Kahn, 1984; Ganter, 1977; Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1984, 1995; Ponterotto, 1988) typically describe movement from a lack of awareness of self as a racial being toward increased racial consciousness and a capacity to relinquish the privileges of racism. The development of a critical consciousness regarding one's role in perpetuating racism, or the ways in which one benefits from White privilege, is a significant aspect of achieving a nonracist

White identity (e.g., Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1995). However, contemporary models of White racial identity do not specifically address counseling students' awareness of White privilege.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation of White counseling students' awareness of White privilege, using as a stimulus a list of White privilege as experienced by one individual, Peggy McIntosh (1995). As such, we were interested in moving beyond an investigation of students' attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups or their awareness of being White, the focus of most models of White racial identity. We sought to examine the extent to which White counseling students possess awareness of the personal benefits of White-skin-color privilege and to identify qualitative differences between White counselor trainees on this dimension. Empirically based research on this important area of counselor self-awareness is lacking. The present investigation involved a qualitative analysis of counseling students' written responses to McIntosh's analysis of her own experience of White privilege.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 34 White, master's-level counseling students enrolled in one of two sections of a course titled Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling at a large southeastern university. The responses from 2 students who were enrolled in the course were excluded from the analysis. One White student declined to have her responses analyzed, and the responses of an African American female student were omitted from the investigation, as the focus of the study was White counseling trainees. Thirty-one students were female, and 3 were male. The average age of participants was 33.4 years, with a range of 22 to 62 ($SD = 11.08$). The majority of participants were born and raised in the southeastern region of the United States.

Participants were enrolled in a counseling program that is accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs. According to university data, the racial/ethnic composition of students enrolled in the counseling master's program is 85% White, 10% Black/Non-Hispanic, 3% Hispanic, and 2% international. This is consistent with the racial/ethnic composition of counseling program faculty (78% White), university students (75% White), and university faculty (89% White). The limited number of people of color in the program and university parallels the experiences of participants. In-class and out-of-class discussions throughout the semester and written assignments revealed that students

possessed limited experience in their personal and professional lives with diversity in terms of readings, interacting with people of color, or attending diverse social and cultural events.

Procedure

The Social and Cultural Issues in Counseling course focuses on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation as related to the theory, research, and practice of counseling and counseling psychology. Lectures, readings, discussions, experiential exercises, and media are utilized. Although all courses in the program attend to diversity issues, the course from which participants were drawn is the only one that focuses exclusively on multicultural issues in counseling. Students enroll in the course in their second year of this 2-year program, after completing courses in the principles of counseling, skills, testing, theory, and growth group.

Toward the latter part of the course, students read McIntosh's (1995) article, which lists 46 circumstances and conditions she has experienced as a White woman, in contrast with African American women, in her workplace. McIntosh describes her personal experiences of unearned advantages associated with White privilege such as (a) accurate, positive, and ample representation of her race in the media, academic institutions, and grade school materials; (b) being able to associate with members of her own race most of the time; (c) easily finding products and services associated with her race and cultural traditions; (d) not experiencing discrimination when renting an apartment or purchasing a home, seeking medical assistance, shopping in a store, using credit cards or checks, and interacting with other White people; (e) engaging in behavior (e.g., talking with a full mouth, being late to a meeting, swearing, dressing in secondhand clothes) without it being attributed to her race; and (f) ignoring or devaluing the cultural values, traditions, and writings of people of color without experiencing any negative consequences. Topics discussed prior to this exercise included the history of multicultural counseling, racial and ethnic identity development models, the history and cultural values of the major racial/ethnic groups in the United States, and gender issues. Other assignments prior to the McIntosh reading included two exams on the material noted; a written exploration of one's racial, ethnic, and religious background; and reaction papers on course material or course-related events.

McIntosh's (1995) list of circumstances and conditions she experiences as a function of her White privilege represents one of the few explicit descriptions of benefits associated with skin-color privilege in the literature. As such, the McIntosh article was used as a projective stimulus to access students' reactions unfiltered by specific instructions. Students were instructed

to “read the McIntosh article, identify 1 or more of the conditions that she describes as relating to her daily experiences of White privilege, and provide affective, cognitive, and/or behavioral reactions to the condition(s) chosen.” Students’ written reactions to the McIntosh article in general and, more specifically, the list of McIntosh’s personal experiences of White privilege provided the data for this study. We viewed the list of McIntosh’s personal experiences as stimuli that would allow students to project their current awareness and understanding of their own White privilege, as well as the system of White privilege, into their written responses.

To minimize concerns about grading and to encourage genuine responses, students were not graded on this exercise. The instructor of the course made it clear to students that she was most interested in their true feelings, not what they perceived would satisfy her as an instructor. Also, students were accustomed to providing written affective and cognitive reactions to the course material in the form of required reaction papers and written anonymous reactions to in-class videos and to the course in general. Although a power differential existed between the instructor and students, efforts were made to create a group dynamic that fostered open and honest discussion. This included the presentation of guidelines that emphasize respect for diverse opinions and confidentiality as well as the instructor’s self-disclosure of her own struggles with diversity issues.

Data Analysis

Qualitative methodology was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of students’ reactions—an approach deemed particularly appropriate for investigating relatively unexplored research questions (Hoshmand, 1989; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). A qualitative approach allowed students’ multiple attitudes, emotions, and complex reactions to the list of McIntosh’s conditions of White privilege to emerge from their written responses, rather than organizing answers according to preexisting categories from the literature (Hoshmand, 1989).

We both analyzed the results. The first author, a White, female counseling psychology faculty member, with 13 years of counseling, diversity training, and research experience served as the instructor of the course. The second author is a White, female, 2nd-year doctoral student in counseling psychology who had completed a multicultural counseling course and is involved in several research projects focusing on issues of gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity. Prior to data analysis, we held two assumptions about White privilege: (a) White counselors are frequently unaware of the privileges they experience as a function of their race, and (b) recognizing White privilege is essential to achieving multicultural competence.

Active steps were taken to achieve trustworthiness, specifically, credibility, transferability, and confirmability—the qualitative equivalents of internal validity, external validity, and objectivity respectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is often achieved through prolonged engagement (e.g., learning the context and building trust) and triangulation (e.g., the use of different investigators). As the instructor of the course, the first author maintained prolonged engagement through consistent interaction with the participants both inside and outside of class. These interactions provided an opportunity to build trust and facilitated an interpretation of the data with an understanding of the context of participants' attitudes and worldviews. Moreover, we both analyzed the data, increasing the likelihood that credible findings and interpretations were achieved via analyst triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability was established by providing "thick descriptions" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316) of the data and describing the context of the study so the reader can determine the extent to which transferability to an alternative situation is justifiable. Confirmability was established by the use of an auditor who was not part of the research team. The auditor, a female, Asian Indian American, 1st-year doctoral student in counseling psychology who had received certification as a multicultural trainer, analyzed the consensus version of the process notes and categorization of the raw data independently.

We analyzed a total of 58 pages of raw data. Reactions ranged from 1 to 3.5 pages, with an average of 1.7 pages. Students responded to an average of 2 conditions (range = 2-6) out of the 46 possible.

Constant comparative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), an inductive process for developing a model to describe the data, was employed. Specific incidents in the data were continually compared, organized, and reorganized into progressively fewer but more meaningful categories. Both of us read and reread students' responses independently to become immersed in the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). We then met to discuss students' responses and general patterns. At this point, we generated a start list of categories from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This resulted in 2 to 6 categories for each participant. We then re-reviewed the data independently, assigned the data to a category or categories, and met continually throughout the analysis to discuss the codings (i.e., one fifth, halfway, three quarters through the data analysis and at the completion of the data analysis). Similar categories were grouped and regrouped after coding the data independently and after meeting together, resulting in 28 and then 20 categories, respectively. We continuously returned to the data to identify patterns and refine categories. During our discussions, we developed 3 discrete general themes that represented varied levels of awareness and action regarding students' perceptions of their own and McIntosh's White privilege, and 11

overlapping subthemes that fell under one of the 3 general themes. We also scrutinized the data for patterns of interactions between themes and the McIntosh items to which students responded. We were unable to identify any patterns. Upon completion of the data analysis, we independently reviewed the coding of participants according to themes and subthemes to check for coding accuracy.

The auditor reviewed a detailed account of the data analysis process and provided feedback to us. As a result, we recoded the responses of 2 participants. We moved both participants' responses from 1 subtheme to another subtheme within the same general theme in accordance with the feedback. The auditor agreed that the themes were relevant and consistent with the data.

RESULTS

The data analysis resulted in a classification scheme describing 3 general themes and 11 corresponding subthemes. The 3 general themes represent increasing levels of awareness, from none (Theme 1: lack of awareness and denial of White privilege), to demonstrated awareness but unwillingness to engage in proaction (Theme 2: demonstrated awareness of White privilege and discrimination), to a more profound awareness of privilege and proactive efforts to eradicate privilege (Theme 3: higher order awareness and commitment to action). Because the general themes represent three discrete levels of awareness and action, we coded each student into only 1 general theme. In cases where students presented multiple reactions within the general theme, we coded students' responses into 2 or more subthemes. We allowed for more flexibility in coding students under multiple subthemes as students' responses revealed several overlapping dimensions within each theme. We encountered minimal overlap between the general themes because students clearly differed in terms of the degree to which they demonstrated awareness and action.

Theme 1: Lack of Awareness and Denial of White Privilege

Ten participants demonstrated a lack of awareness and denial of either McIntosh's accounts of her White privilege or their own privilege. These students demonstrated resistance to acknowledging either McIntosh's White privilege or their own in a variety of ways. Anger, selective perception, and distortion of the intended meaning of McIntosh's conditions of privilege were common. Theme 1 responses were categorized into 5 subthemes.

Anger and defensiveness. One half of the students who demonstrated a lack of awareness expressed anger and defensiveness. Students expressed a range of negative affect in response to the McIntosh article. They described "anger" at "being made to feel guilty," "irritated," "offended" by McIntosh's thesis, "startled" by the inaccuracies of McIntosh's conditions, "blamed," and stereotyped by McIntosh. In some cases, students blatantly attacked McIntosh. After dismissing McIntosh's list of privileged conditions, 1 female student indicated, "I got the feeling that she [McIntosh] has enjoyed much success in her profession, and perhaps she is feeling guilty about it."

Attribution of differential treatment to nonracial factors. Four participants denied privilege by attributing differential treatment to factors other than race, such as gender, manners, or socioeconomic status. For example, in response to the condition "Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance that I am financially reliable" (McIntosh, 1995, p. 79), 1 female student asked,

Is it skin color or the appearance of being a member of the socioeconomic class who can afford to shop in this particular location? Have you ever been dressed rather shabbily and happened to wander into a "high class" store? How much assistance did you receive? Did you feel that you were being eyed suspiciously? I have.

Another female student, in response to the condition "If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live" (McIntosh, 1995, p. 79), indicated, "If one assumes that class is not a factor, persons of roughly equal economic status should be able to live in equally desirable housing." These students refused to acknowledge the significance of race, racial discrimination, and White privilege.

Several of these students seemed to misinterpret or distort the conditions listed by McIntosh. For example, in response to conditions describing the privilege of speaking with one's mouth full or being late, without having these be attributed to one's race, a female student indicated,

I disagree that my eating with my mouth open will be overlooked because of my white skin. This is a matter of manners, not skin color or privilege! I also feel being late for meetings is not a race issue, but a personal trait. I'm white and always late.

This student denied the existence of misattributions or stereotyping as a function of the target individual's race.

Focus on exceptions to the rule. Three students who demonstrated a lack of awareness focused on incidents that were exceptions to the rule or isolated experiences to delegitimize the existence of White privilege and support the belief that all persons encounter the same experiences. For example, 1 female student indicated that “anyone that tries hard enough can arrange to be around their race or ethnic group most of the time.” These students were unable to move beyond their own limited experiences and seemed to lack an understanding of the systemic nature of White privilege. A male student, in response to the condition “I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider” (McIntosh, 1995, p. 80), indicated,

Of all the white privileges that McIntosh lists one is obviously not reserved just for whites. . . . In the early 1950's anyone dissenting about the government was accused of being a communist and blackballed. Today complaining about the government is a national past time. If you don't find fault with the government then there is something wrong with you.

This student resisted acknowledging the freedom associated with White privilege by invoking the notion that all individuals' freedoms have been equally restricted. Moreover, he invoked the notion that we are all “in the same boat” with regard to being critical of the government. This belief may allow him to attribute power and privilege to an external source (i.e., the government) and enable him to deny personal experience of White privilege.

Lack of connection between own marginalized status and other “-isms.” Three students' conceptions of injustice were limited solely to their own victimization. These students expressed resentment toward racial and ethnic minorities for their perceived privileges and resentment that others did not recognize the participant's own marginalized status. One female student stated, “It seemed to me that most of these statements [i.e., the conditions listed by McIntosh] were geared toward race and not toward sex, therefore most of these did not have as much of an impact on me.” One European American woman of low socioeconomic status living and working in an African American community described her “fear,” isolation, and “anger” over not finding water crackers, Brie cheese, or White hair products in the local supermarket or drug store. She discussed her “struggle between identifying with the upper Anglo-Saxon class and accepting my lower middle income Slavic heritage.” She did not acknowledge any parallels between her own struggles with class and ethnicity and the struggles of people of color.

Conflicted and contradictory reactions. Three students demonstrated conflicted and contradictory attitudes and emotions regarding the acknowledgment of McIntosh's or their own White privilege. Although these students clearly denied the existence of White privilege and racism, they acknowledged that the article prompted them to think about personal benefits as a function of being White. Thus, these students seemed to initiate the process of self-questioning and critical analysis. One female student indicated,

Overall, a majority of the conditions were true. However, I found some of them completely not related to race and was offended that they were placed in such a context. Of course, I very well may have felt differently if I was not White and more aware of my environment as a member of a minority group.

Interestingly, the anger and experience of being offended noted in this response share some commonalities with the "attack the author" responses noted in the first subtheme.

Theme 2: Demonstrated Awareness of White Privilege and Discrimination

Ten students demonstrated an introductory awareness of their White privilege and discrimination in their responses to the McIntosh list of conditions. They acknowledged greater opportunities as a function of being White and related power dynamics. Eight out of 10 Theme 2 students attributed their increased realization of privilege and discrimination to reading the McIntosh article. Four students attributed their increased awareness to personal experiences with people of color. Theme 2 responses were categorized into 2 subthemes.

Sadness and disgust about privilege. Three students expressed negative affect, particularly guilt and disgust, regarding their own and others' White privilege. One female student stated, "When I got to the author's list, I got disgusted because I realized that as a White person, there are many things about my life that I take for granted." In contrast to those students who lacked awareness, these students acknowledged McIntosh's and their own White privilege and related benefits. They expressed grief, sadness, shock, disgust, and feeling disturbed and bothered by White privilege and its effects on non-Whites. These students seemed to move beyond their feelings of guilt to a more critical analysis of their privilege. For example, 1 female student stated,

My initial reaction to her article was a feeling of guilt over my lack of appreciation for my unearned status. I have since redirected my feelings of guilt to an increased understanding of how my color has affected my life so far.

Awareness, yet unwilling to relinquish privilege. Seven students expressed an awareness of White privilege; however, they either accepted no responsibility for their position or clearly indicated that they were not willing to challenge or relinquish privilege. One female student indicated, "I know that there is such a thing as White privilege, I hope that I do not help to perpetuate it," thus indicating no responsibility for change. In fact, several indicated that they were content with the status quo. One female student stated,

I accept most of the things listed in the article as part of being White. I am not sure if this is correct or not, but it is part of my world, one that I know and I am comfortable with. I do not wish to change it or have the stability of it threatened. Maybe I am selfish and unfair but I like being White and what it does for me.

Theme 3: Higher Order Awareness and Commitment to Action

Fourteen students seemed to express a higher order awareness indicating greater complexity of thought and action. In addition to possessing empathy regarding the impact of racism on people of color, these students demonstrated an awareness of the systemic nature of privilege and provided an analysis of the majority's resistance to change. Moreover, several students demonstrated an understanding of the parallels between multiple forms of oppression. Finally, others took some type of action in the form of either challenging their own or others' White privilege. Twelve out of 14 Theme 3 students attributed their awareness to reading the McIntosh article. Two students attributed their increased awareness to personal experiences with people of color. Theme 3 responses were categorized into 4 subthemes.

Understanding of the pervasiveness of privilege. Nine students acknowledged the pervasiveness of privilege and racism as well as the parallels between multiple forms of oppression (i.e., sexism, racism, and homophobia). One female student, in response to the condition "I can choose blemish cover or bandages in 'flesh' color and have them more or less match my skin" (McIntosh, 1995, p. 81), stated,

This article made me think about the subtleties of the system of oppression in our country. I can easily hide my blemishes. I do not have to prove certain qualities because of my race. I do not have to worry that every mistake I make will

be blamed on my race, so I do not feel the pressure that minorities face every day.

In contrast to students described under earlier themes, these students recognized aspects of their own identity that resulted in being oppressed and those that conferred privilege. One female student stated,

Not long ago, I denied even being privileged because I am discriminated against in terms of my class and gender, although I have become aware of my White privilege compared to other groups who are denied the same things that I am not.

Another female student stated,

I feel that there are a great many barriers to success for me because of my gender. What I had neglected to consider was the experiences of women of color, the effect of being doubly discriminated against. How I could have missed this, I don't know.

Understanding of majority's resistance to change. Seven students demonstrated an awareness of the majority's resistance to change. One female student indicated,

I agree with McIntosh. There is an invisible package of unearned privilege in our society. I imagine we, as Whites, don't look at it or acknowledge it, because deep within our hearts, somewhere—silently we are glad it exists. We are glad that we are benefiting from the bias. It makes us feel safer and more in control.

A male student stated,

I noticed the desire to wish away my involvement in discrimination and white male entitlement. . . . Privilege is reached through an inherently covert system of understood assertions which are perpetuated by ignorance and an unwillingness to be deeply analytical and honest (by White males). That is, I think the system perpetuates itself. White men feel no guilt if they do not attempt to uncover the injustice.

Understanding of the effects of privilege on people of color. Eight students who expressed an awareness of the impact of racism on people of color were able to transcend their own experiences. One female student stated,

Although I cannot know whether options will be open to me as a woman, I do know that women of color must consider many more barriers and prejudice than I do when looking for a job, getting promoted, and being seen as worthy in general.

Another female student indicated, "The continued devaluing of people and lack of respect for differences has a daily impact on the lives of all minorities."

Moved to act or initiated action. Nine students indicated that they either took action or were moved to challenge either their own or others' racism. One female student stated, "My bias feels ingrained and I actively work to think differently." Another female student described confronting store clerks for their biased treatment (i.e., requesting identification from her friends of color to cash a check but not from her). One female student wrote,

Although most people encounter experiences or opportunities which they could learn from, we choose instead to separate ourselves so as not to feel different or rejected, or uncomfortable. This seems the natural reaction, but at some point people must put themselves in a position which is uncomfortable or different in order to gain a deeper understanding of what forces lie within us and within society to make up such a complex web of prejudices and inequities based on such things as race and gender.

Some students described heated arguments with other Whites regarding White privilege or described their plans to educate their children about White privilege. Another female student indicated, "I feel now that perhaps I am not entirely powerless. Obviously, I cannot expect to change the system in its entirety, but . . . I can put 5% extra toward one thing that would make a difference."

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide insight into the particular ways in which some White counseling students deny and dismiss the existence of systemic White privilege. Students who expressed Theme 1 responses tended to reflect the core American values of egalitarianism (i.e., everyone is the same) and individualism (i.e., anyone who tries hard enough can achieve) (see Katz & Hass, 1988). Acknowledging their own privilege as a function of skin color would serve to violate the validity of students' core beliefs and call into question the myth of meritocracy and related achievement. Interestingly, Theme 1 included more subthemes compared to Themes 2 and 3. Students who lack awareness of White privilege may have developed a multiplicity of rationalizations to protect their belief system. Such beliefs are probably not challenged and may be encouraged within the predominantly White environment in which these students are educated and live. Thus, these students may be operating within a complex system of social norms, which fosters multiple

forms of denial regarding the existence of White privilege (Thompson & Neville, 1999).

These results highlight the complexity of not only students' reactions to McIntosh's list of her experience of White privilege but also their own processing of racial information. Students' reactions to the material seemed to be composed of multiple and interrelated components (i.e., attitudes toward one's whiteness and associated privileges), self-exploration of the intersections of one's socio-identities (e.g., gender, ethnicity, class), and attitudes toward racially different individuals. For example, students' awareness of White privilege was associated with empathy toward other racial groups, and a lack of awareness was associated with denial concerning the realities of prejudice and discrimination experienced by racial minorities. Similarly, students who examined the privileges associated with their multiple socio-identities with respect to gender, ethnicity, and class also articulated an understanding of White privilege and its impact on others. Whereas some Theme 1 students expressed resentment that others did not recognize their own marginality in terms of their gender, ethnicity, and class, as well as resentment toward racial minorities for their perceived privileges, some Theme 3 students articulated the parallels between their own marginal status and those who were not the recipients of White privilege. Most Theme 3 students also indicated that, although they lacked privilege in terms of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and so on, they benefited as a function of their race. More research is needed to examine the relationship between self-exploration of one's own gender, ethnic, or socioeconomic group membership and attitudes toward one's whiteness and associated privileges, as well as attitudes toward other racial/ ethnic groups. Limited self-exploration about one's multiple socio-identities may limit one's ability to acknowledge the privileges associated with being White and to empathize with the experiences of racial minorities (Ancis & Ladany, 2001).

The results also highlight the complexity of people's behaviors regarding racial issues, that is, their involvement in breaking away from racism and simultaneously perpetuating it (Thompson & Neville, 1999). This was evident in some Theme 2 students who articulated an awareness of White privilege yet were unwilling to relinquish it. The predominantly White context of the counseling program in terms of course work, peers, and instructors, and the limited personal contact with people of color, may limit the extent to which students have opportunities to challenge themselves to act.

We recognize that contextual variables such as our race and perspective regarding White privilege, as well as the program and course context, influenced our interpretations of the data. Our position as White persons who continue to engage in self-reflection regarding our own White privilege allowed us to recognize the many levels and dimensions of White-privilege awareness

reflected in the themes. Moreover, the fact that the course was required allowed for the representation of a range of student responses and awareness levels that may not be evident in an elective course with self-selected individuals.

During data analysis, we had two main reactions to students' responses. One was shock concerning the blatant negative reactions and denial of White privilege expressed by some of the Theme 1 students. The other was surprise concerning the large number of students who expressed demonstrated awareness and higher order awareness of their own and the system of White privilege. We had expected this number to be much lower and thus questioned the impact of social desirability on students' responses. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Qualitative researchers must guard against bias in data analysis and ensure that interpretations reflect the data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). We took several steps to address this issue; that is, we employed a research team composed of individuals representing varied levels of training and education, used an auditor with multicultural expertise yet whose recent educational experience was consistent with the participants' (i.e., she had recently completed a master's degree in counseling), and continually reviewed the data and engaged in discussions throughout the analysis process. Nonetheless, the results are based on our perceptions, and the study needs to be replicated.

The respondents were primarily female. Different themes may have emerged with a predominately White male sample, as previous research has demonstrated that female counseling students possess less stereotyped gender and racial attitudes than their male counterparts (Johnson, Searight, Handal, & Gibbons, 1993; Pope-Davis & Ottavi, 1994). Moreover, many of these women students' personal experiences with and awareness of gender bias may have influenced their understanding of a parallel oppression (i.e., White privilege) (hooks, 1984; Siegel, 1990).

The fact that the instructor of the course was White may have also influenced students' responses. Theme 1 and Theme 2 students may have been more comfortable expressing themselves with a White instructor than with an instructor of color. Alternatively, Theme 2 and 3 students may have been apprehensive about expressing more blatant negative reactions to the McIntosh reading as a function of the instructor's stance regarding the importance of multicultural awareness and the nature of the exercise. The fact that this was a multicultural counseling course and students were evaluated throughout the semester may have resulted in Theme 2 and 3 students' positive reactions to the McIntosh article. Also, the nature of the exercise and

McIntosh's critical analysis of White people's lack of recognition of skin-color privilege may have influenced students' more personalized reactions, especially Theme 1 students' anger and defensiveness. Alternatively, the nature of the exercise and McIntosh's analysis may have influenced Theme 2 and 3 students to respond in a more socially desirable way. However, given the fact that the written reactions were not graded, that open discussion was encouraged throughout the course, and the explicit nature of the reactions, perhaps most students expressed their honest reactions to the material.

Another consideration concerns the fact that McIntosh's list of circumstances and conditions associated with White privilege are based on her personal observations (P. McIntosh, personal communication, April 10, 1999). White privilege may manifest itself differently depending on one's particular life experiences. Future research may investigate the particular ways in which White privilege influences one's personal and professional life and how skin-color privilege interacts with other personal identities, such as one's gender, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability to influence one's experiences and perceptions. Despite the fact that the 46 items on McIntosh's lists are autobiographical in nature, we argue that most, if not all, can be used to describe the experience of the majority of individuals perceived as White in the United States. Moreover, as evidenced in the examples provided, most students discussed the relevance of McIntosh's conditions and White privilege in their own lives, thereby personalizing their reactions.

This investigation focused on awareness of White privilege at one point in time. Thus, we made no assumptions regarding the progression of awareness over time. Future investigations may assess the development of students' awareness over time and the system of White privilege and explore those factors that affect such awareness.

This study describes the reactions of 34 White counseling students engaged in multicultural counseling coursework in a predominantly White counseling program. Future research may analyze the reactions of White students enrolled in a more racially/ethnically diverse counseling program and the impact of racially/ethnically diverse peers and faculty on White students' awareness. Future investigations may also assess White-privilege awareness of counseling students who are enrolled at various points in their graduate education (e.g., master's and doctoral students or comparing students who have completed a multicultural counseling course with those who have not completed such training).

Although previous investigations have demonstrated a positive relationship between multicultural course work, workshops, and clinical supervision, and counseling students' levels of reported multicultural counseling competencies (Pope-Davis, Reynolds, Dings, & Ottavi, 1994), little research

has been conducted on the influence of instructional stimuli on White students' perceptions of White privilege. Perhaps early exposure to readings about White privilege and engagement in cross-cultural interactions would result in a more advanced understanding of White privilege. We recommend that research be conducted on training interventions designed to facilitate a more complex understanding of the interrelationships between White privilege and privilege based on gender, sexual orientation, economic wealth, and so on, as well as an understanding of how one's privileged status varies as a function of context (Wildman, 1996). Research on the long-term impact of instructional strategies designed to encourage self-exploration and dialogue among students representing varying levels of White privilege awareness may further inform curriculum efforts.

Most important, more research needs to be conducted to identify the multiple and interrelated components of White racial identity and awareness of White privilege as well as how these components are interactively transformed as one develops increased awareness. In addition, research is needed to identify how trainees' and clinicians' awareness and understanding of White privilege affects the psychological services they provide to racially and ethnically diverse clientele. We believe that qualitative methodology is particularly suited to this type of endeavor.

Implications for Training

The multiplicity of White students' attitudes toward White privilege underscores the importance of designing multicultural counseling training accordingly. The results suggest several training objectives aimed at facilitating counseling competence.

Theme 1 students did not acknowledge the social and personal significance of race. The resistance to McIntosh's testimony about her own White privilege may indicate a limited ability to engage self-reflective material. Moreover, students' denial of White privilege reflects a limited awareness of the personal benefits of being White, coupled with a limited understanding of racism and its effects on people of color. Training efforts need to foster students' ability to listen to client testimony about racial issues and address both aspects of students' denial. Training interventions that challenge the notion that differential treatment is unrelated to racial factors are needed. Students may view segments from television shows such as *Dateline* and *20/20* that illustrate differential treatment by race in situations such as renting an apartment and buying a house. Ethnographic exercises can include observations of how individuals of different racial backgrounds are treated in stores, restaurants, clinics, and so on. For example, students may be instructed to keep a detailed log of these experiences, including how long it takes shoppers to be

waited on, how much time is spent with the shopper, and the behavior of security guards.

Several students' conceptions of justice were limited to their own victimization. Although they were able to acknowledge their own oppression (e.g., female, lower socioeconomic status), they were unable to recognize themselves as the oppressor. Relatedly, they were unable to make connections between multiple forms of oppression and use their own experiences to empathize with others' discriminatory experiences. Exercises that challenge students to relate their own experiences of being treated unfairly to racial discrimination and associated White privilege would be relevant. Exercises that identify situations in students' lives when their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class were advantageous and those situations in which these socio-identities resulted in disadvantage might help create connections across identities. Students may engage in small-group discussions and identify similarities and differences between their experiences. Discussion can develop about the implications of multiple identities in terms of a person's perceptions and experiences. Similarly, case studies that highlight the interplay of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and class might prove valuable.

Many Theme 1 students expressed defensiveness and anger toward the McIntosh article, emotions that hinder counselors' self-exploration of the influence of their values, biases, and worldviews on clients and others. Similarly, emotions such as guilt and shame can result in dysfunctional rescuing, paternalism, and a reluctance to use confrontational skills when necessary (Ridley, 1995). The use of journals, wherein students describe their affective reactions to the material, may be a useful tool to help students identify emotional barriers that may interfere with effective helping. Feedback from the instructor can help students consider which affective reactions they typically experience in multicultural counseling encounters, examine the cognitive messages associated with these feelings, and challenge them to resolve those affective and cognitive states that may interfere with their ability to engage in self-reflection and listen effectively to clients.

Theme 2 and Theme 3 students demonstrated awareness of White privilege and racism and its effects on people of color. Students described two primary factors that contributed to their increased awareness (i.e., reading the McIntosh article and personal experiences with people of color). The usefulness of including more experiential and personal readings and discussions on White privilege in courses cannot be underestimated. Such articles enable students to understand the insidious and pervasive nature of White privilege and how such privilege affects their own lives as well as those of non-Whites. Class discussion of White privilege allows students to hear varied perspectives and provides an opportunity for denial and distortions to be challenged

by peers. Given that Theme 2 and 3 students attributed some of their understanding to interactions with people of color, exercises that facilitate personal encounters with people of color may be employed (Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977; Wehrly, 1991). For example, students may interview people of color about their experiences of racism and its impact on their lives.

Interestingly, several Theme 2 students expressed an awareness of the pervasiveness of White privilege yet indicated that they were not willing to change and were content with the status quo. Readings and exercises that promote an exploration of how White privilege limits White counselors' own interpersonal functioning and freedom may help to facilitate higher order awareness. Social advocacy, social activism, and antiracism activities may be presented as an ethical norm by emphasizing the relationship between nonaction and power imbalances, failures of mutuality, and a lack of respect in clinical situations (Brown, 1995).

Theme 3 students seemed to express an awareness of White privilege characterized by complexity of thought and action. Several Theme 3 students either took action or were moved to challenge their own or others' racism. Instructors can facilitate action strategies among students. Students may be asked to brainstorm actions they can take on an individual level to help eradicate White privilege (Corvin & Wiggins, 1989). White social activists may serve as guest speakers to model and discuss social advocacy efforts. Instructors may also model strategies to combat White privilege and racism in everyday life. For example, students can be taught how to interrupt racist jokes and remarks using strategies such as wonderment, humor, exaggeration, and questioning (National Coalition Building Institute, 1991). Students may also be encouraged to actively engage in community change efforts and write about their experiences.

Instructors can play an important role in facilitating counseling students' awareness of White privilege. Students differ in their awareness of White privilege and willingness to challenge racism. Moreover, White-privilege awareness and decisions to act are composed of diverse and complex components, requiring flexible, sensitive, and creative interventions. The aforementioned strategies may be particularly useful when working with students who are struggling with these issues.

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