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Moving Beyond Complacency to Commitment: Multicultural Research in Counseling Psychology

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This reaction addresses the Major Contribution related to multicultural research in counseling psychology. Although the three articles composing the Major Contribution have different foci and may be viewed independently, an implicit proposal inherent within each is the call to move beyond complacency to commitment, a phrase devised by Carter, Akinsulure-Smith, Smailes, and Clauss (1998) in their literature review of multicultural research in several counseling psychology journals. Carter et al. suggested that investigators address whether multiculturally focused research adds new knowledge about racial and ethnic minorities to the counseling psychology literature, thus moving the field forward (i.e., showing commitment), or simply reiterates the status quo (i.e., remains complacent). We highlight aspects of this theme that are common throughout the Major Contribution in addition to providing our critique and comments specific to each.

As multicultural leaders (Parham, 2001; Sue, 2003, 2005) have asserted, we concur that investigating the psyche of the imposer (i.e., Whites) is essential to understand, address, and ultimately dismantle racism. Hence, our conceptual and empirical research centers on how White individuals react to and are affected by racism and other racial issues, such as Whites' experiences of the psychosocial costs of racism, which will be defined. Accordingly, we focus on the meaning and implications for White counseling psychologists and trainees.

RACISM AND OPPRESSION WITHIN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

Although counseling psychologists have made considerable contributions in developing the field of multicultural counseling through the creation of textbooks (e.g., Sue & Sue, 2003), handbooks (e.g., Ponterotto, Casas, Suzuki, & Alexander, 1995, 2001), and policy (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2003), we have only begun to tackle racism and oppression.

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One only need briefly examine the Major Contribution to identify issues of racism and oppression. Delgado-Romero, Galvan, Maschino, and Rowland (2005 [this issue]) underscore the lack of attention to racial and ethnic minority issues in counseling and counseling psychology research.

Regrettably, Delgado-Romero et al. (2005 [this issue]) report that attention to racial and ethnic issues in our field has shown only a marginal increase with regard to quantity and quality. For example, among the empirical articles reviewed, Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans were underrepresented, whereas their White and Asian American counterparts were overrepresented. Delgado-Romero and colleagues aptly state that the professional dominance of White researchers is responsible for this representation, and we add that editors and reviewers are also responsible.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]) also call attention to the Eurocentric bias present in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; *DSM-IV-TR*; American Psychiatric Association, 2000), such that experiences of racism are not classified as psychological trauma, despite the myriad similarities between racist incidents and sexual abuse. The timely investigation by Utsey, Gernat, and Hammar (2005 [this issue]) of White trainees' responses to racial issues in counseling provides empirical data that support the existence of subtle forms of racism among trainees. Thus, we view moving beyond complacency to a stance of commitment as a commitment toward dismantling racism within our field. As leading multicultural scholars have suggested, one way of addressing this move is through focusing on the psyche of the oppressor by means of empirical investigation of Whites and Whiteness (Parham, 2001; Sue, 2003).

COMPLEXITY OF WHITES' REACTIONS TOWARD RACISM

A theme that was addressed either directly or indirectly among each article in the Major Contribution relates to the complexity of White individuals' reactions toward racism and racial issues. Because in the United States Whiteness is the norm by which all racial and ethnic minority individuals are compared, Whiteness is often invisible. For example, Sue (2003) informally interviewed White individuals about what it means to be White and obtained several hostile, dumbfounded, and apathetic responses such as, "That's a stupid question!" and "I don't know . . . because it's not important to me" (pp. 116-117). We believe that more modern (e.g., McConahay, 1986) and ultra-modern (e.g., color-blind racial ideology; Neville, Lilly, Lee, Duran, & Browne, 2000) forms of racism reflect greater degrees of complexity when compared with old-fashioned, blatant, individual racism. As expressions of racism have become more subtle and covert, reactions to racism subsequently

have become more subtle, covert, and complex. For example, Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]) refer to Bonilla-Silva's (2002) thought-provoking sociological accounts of Whites' subtle expressions of racism toward Blacks, which draw attention to the highly complex nature of the phenomenon.

The results presented in each article underscore the need to consider the multiple interacting factors present when studying Whites in research on race and racism. Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]) heed the call of Parham (2001) and Sue (2005) and address Whiteness head-on. Furthermore, they integrate three important areas that are often separated in the literature (i.e., White racial identity development, White privilege, and color-blind racial ideology) to address the complexity of racial dynamics as they influence counseling and supervision dyads. We also view these constructs as highly interrelated, such that White privilege and color-blind racial ideology are aspects of Helms' (1990) White racial identity development model, although she may not have used these terms. Thus, it is logical to view these concepts collectively, which may add to the understanding of each.

As an added construct of interest, and another aspect of the complexity present in Whites' racial attitudes, researchers should also explore the costs of racism to Whites. These costs refer to the negative ways in which White individuals are affected by the existence and perpetuation of racism (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004). The costs to Whites are not comparable with those experienced by racial minorities and instead reflect the notion that racism negatively affects all individuals (Kivel, 1996; Tatum, 1992). Researchers have identified several costs and have proposed various representative classification models. Goodman (2000) articulated a comprehensive model for the more generalized concept of costs of oppression to privileged groups. These categories included psychological, social, moral and spiritual, intellectual, and material and physical costs. Spanierman and Heppner (2004) categorized these costs in relation to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral tripartite model. Many costs of racism to White individuals are delineated in these models as a result of being privileged in an unjust system.

Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]) successfully addressed the complexity of Whites' responses to racial issues, which is reflected in their findings. For example, Utsey et al.'s data reflect one prominently studied cost, White guilt (Arminio, 2001; Harvey & Oswald, 2000; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Swim & Miller, 1999). Minimizing race as an issue, the most commonly occurring theme among the focus group participants, is consistent with our recent investigation among White university students at a predominantly White institution, where distortion and denial of racism were typical among our interviewees (Spanierman et al., 2005; Spanierman, Poteat, & Beer, 2005). Discomfort with racial issues, a theme reflecting participants' difficulties discussing race, exemplifies Bonilla-

Silva's (2002) concept of rhetorical incoherence. We must also consider that the participants, similar to many White individuals, may not have developed the language with which to discuss race and racial issues. In some cases White individuals' discomfort discussing racial issues may be related to their irrational fear of people of a different race (Kivel, 1996; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004).

Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]) also suggested that guilt led to displaced anger and hostility of the participants (e.g., blaming the victims for being oppressed). This finding might be inconsistent with previous research. For example, Iyer et al. (2003) found that guilt predicted positive attitudes toward compensatory affirmative action policies, which is quite different from blaming African Americans for their plight. In our own recent investigation, we found that White guilt predicted higher levels of multicultural counseling competence (Spanierman et al., 2005; Spanierman, Poteat, et al., 2005). This finding leads us to question whether the construct of White guilt is the same across the studies.

In the quantitative literature two different instruments have been used to measure White guilt (e.g., Iyer et al., 2003; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Swim & Miller, 1999); additionally, the criteria used to assess White guilt in qualitative investigations has not yet been clearly articulated. Note that research in psychology has not yet delineated guilt and shame experienced by Whites as a result of being privileged. Focus group participants may have expressed complex reactions tapping into both constructs, which may not be assessed in quantitative investigations. We also speculate that perhaps the association among White guilt and related constructs (e.g., multicultural competence) is not linear, such that moderate levels are optimal. Evidently, the constructs of White guilt and shame warrant further investigation.

Additionally, several consequences listed by Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]) reflect the costs of racism to Whites. The authors list dysfunctional cognitive beliefs as one cost, which has also been reflected in our previous research and research on color-blind racial attitudes (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001; Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2005). Additionally, irrational fear (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; St. John & Heald-Moore, 1995) and anger toward racial minorities (Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2005; Spanierman, Poteat, et al., 2005) have been identified as reactions to racism and other issues.

Two constructs specifically examined by Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]), White privilege and color-blind racial attitudes, along with the psychosocial costs of racism to Whites might also be applied to further explain the findings reported by Delgado-Romero et al. (2005 [this issue]) and Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]). The striking results presented by Delgado-Romero and colleagues suggest that racial color-blindness and White privi-

lege may be antecedents to the lack of attention to racial and ethnic minority issues in counseling and counseling psychology research. These constructs affect the type of research that is conducted, funded, and published in peer-reviewed journals. For example, if researchers are unaware of race and racial issues then they may not consider reporting contextual information related to participants' race and ethnicity. Because White individuals are in the dominant position in the U.S. racial hierarchy, they can choose to ignore racial issues in their research. Furthermore, White editors operating under a racially color-blind ideology will not view race as a salient and critical component to be addressed in research submitted for publication, especially investigations in which race or racial issues are not the central theme.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]) refer to Bandura's (2002) notion of moral disengagement as one barrier to realizing the traumatic nature of racist events for racial and ethnic minorities. We propose, in addition, that color-blind racial attitudes and White privilege also characterize how these barriers function. Color-blind racial attitudes and White privilege allow White individuals to deny or minimize the occurrence of racist incidents and their harmful effects, especially those that occur at the institutional and cultural levels. Similar to Bandura's moral disengagement, color-blind racial attitudes are characterized by cognitive distortions that indirectly diffuse responsibility away from the perpetrators and allow White individuals to maintain their belief in a just world and meritocracy. Researchers studying White privilege have noted that these privileges are often masked, as Whites rationalize and justify certain inequalities through setting norms and expectations that favor White individuals and redefine racism as only individual, as opposed to institutional, actions (Bailey, 1999; Jensen, 2002; Wildman & Davis, 1996). In this way, White privilege can also be compared with the notion of moral disengagement, in which individuals redefine conditions to favor their own beliefs and behaviors (Bandura, 2002).

Racist incidents at the institutional and cultural levels could be especially overwhelming and traumatic to racial and ethnic minorities, as they are more expansive and pervasive compared with individual racism (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001). Racist incidents are most easily comparable with the established notion of trauma when they are overt and distinct events experienced directly by an individual. Divergence from one or more of these characteristics makes the comparison with the traditional understanding of trauma less direct. Contributing to the difficulty of incorporating institutional and cultural forms of racist incidents into the conceptualization of trauma is the individualistic world view of the dominant racial group (i.e., Whites). Many White individuals are reluctant to consider racism as occurring beyond the individual level (Wildman & Davis, 1996). Further complicating the inclusion of institutional and cultural racist incidents is the comparison of race-

based trauma to forms of trauma that are enacted at the individual level. For instance, although the acceptability of rape is perpetuated by institutional and cultural means (e.g., rape myths and failure to prosecute or consistently punish offenders), the actual rape is committed by an individual. Racial and ethnic minorities can directly experience trauma from racist incidents occurring at the institutional and cultural levels. This trauma cannot easily be compared with that from rape and even less easily compared with that from domestic violence.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The results of the Major Contribution articles serve as a stimulus for a range of additional studies. We support follow-up studies similar to that of Delgado-Romero et al. (2005 [this issue]) to serve as one specific gauge of our progress in addressing multicultural issues in counseling psychology research. With regard to the findings of Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]), we see a need for investigating how White students might respond similarly and differently given racially diverse versus racially homogenous (i.e., only White) focus groups. We also agree with the suggestion to replicate the study with a multiculturally trained sample. This replication could lead to the emergence of new issues and themes not present in the current investigation. Studies including participants at various levels of multicultural counseling competency could help assess the influence and usefulness of multicultural training and suggest ways in which to adapt training to better address these issues with White trainees. Additionally, it is unclear whether the sexually provocative nature of the vignettes influenced participants' responses; thus, we suggest replication with less sexual content to avoid a possible confound.

As an expansion on the suggestions of Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]) for further research, we suggest that investigators incorporate the intersection of identities and how multiple minority statuses affect reactions to race-based trauma. Finally, we urge researchers to extend this comparison with trauma to include other minority and oppressed groups (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals and individuals with disabilities). We propose that a general category of oppression-based trauma be formed and eventually incorporated into the *DSM-IV-TR* to encapsulate these more specific forms of trauma (e.g., race-based trauma, heterosexism-based trauma, and ability-based trauma).

Delgado-Romero et al. (2005 [this issue]) emphasized that great expense and time are involved in gathering large racial and ethnic minority samples for studying within-group differences and that the field must find collective

ways to overcome these difficulties. By using the contextual intervention model suggested by Neville et al. (2001), interventions would occur on several levels. On an individual level, researchers might actively seek racial and ethnic minority participants rather than use samples of convenience (i.e., predominantly White college students). This effort may require more initial work for researchers, such as actively establishing collaboration with other units on campus (e.g., African American studies program) or seeking community participation, but will make an important contribution. On a professional or organizational level, funding agencies might increase the number of grants that support research focused on racial and ethnic minorities, which in turn would encourage scholars to invest time and energy in this important work. Also on a professional level, Delgado-Romero et al. indicate a prevalence of quantitative methods among the empirical articles examined in their review. As Ponterotto (2002) suggested, qualitative methods are well-suited for multicultural research and are becoming increasingly utilized by counseling psychologists in this area. We believe that greater reliance on qualitative methods may add to research literature in important ways. For example, qualitative multicultural researchers do not need large sample sizes to examine within-group differences; therefore, using these methods to examine the heterogeneity among various racial populations may be more feasible.

Note that White researchers should not rely solely on racial and ethnic minority scholars to pursue multicultural research but should actively develop their own research agendas to study such issues. Our training programs must encourage White students to research racial and ethnic minority populations and provide students with the necessary skills. This emphasis should be integrated into the curricula (e.g., research methods texts and classes) rather than be positioned on the periphery. In addition to racial and ethnic minority research, we must also increase empirical attention to investigating race and racial issues among White participants.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND PRACTICE

The findings from the Major Contribution also suggest several implications for training and practice. The results of Utsey et al. (2005 [this issue]) underscore the importance of training White individuals in racial awareness in addition to providing knowledge about race and racism. Because race is an emotionally volatile or sensitive construct, multicultural counseling courses must attend to affect in addition to imparting cognitive knowledge. This model of integrating affective and cognitive components is reflected in the Columbia University Teachers College Racial-Cultural Counseling Labora-

tory (see Carter, 2003). To manage students' emotions in the classroom, instructors must work to create an environment that is both challenging and supportive (Kiselica, 1998).

Instructors must also counter socially desirable and politically correct environments and encourage students and supervisees to be honest about their negative feelings. Until they are expressed, instructors and/or supervisors cannot work with negative feelings. Often, White students are reluctant to share negative attitudes for fear of being seen as racist (Tatum, 1992) or for fear of a negative evaluation by their instructor or supervisor. Addressing the above issues when training White counseling students can foster an increased commitment to the inclusion of racial and ethnic minority issues in research and competent multicultural counseling.

Bryant-Davis and Ocampo's (2005 [this issue]) discussion of racism-based trauma provides a reason for training White counseling psychology students to become aware of their racial identity and the existence of race and racism and to develop multicultural competence with regard to knowledge, awareness, and skills. All counselors must examine their beliefs about and definition of trauma and its connection with racism. Counselors may more easily acknowledge that racism is traumatic when racism is overt and directly experienced by the client. However, because modern forms of racism are often covert and subtle (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001), counselors should not dismiss incidents that do not appear to be blatantly racist. Counselors must also recognize the potentially traumatizing nature of institutional and cultural racism and that reactions to race-based trauma might differ depending on the level at which it is experienced.

White counselors who are unaware of their privileges as White individuals, or who hold strong color-blind racial attitudes, might be more likely to minimize or deny that traumatic incidents are based on race. Dismissing or minimizing the impact of these incidents or denying the role of racism in the events could lead clients to experience even higher levels of distress or other traumatic symptoms and to drop out of therapy. Ancis and Szymanski (2001) found that some White counseling students expressed denial, anger, and defensiveness when confronted with the notion of White privilege. Similarly, some participants in the study by Utsey and colleagues (2005 [this issue]) attempted to avoid, deny, and minimize race and the effects of racism in the counseling vignettes.

Counselors should also be aware of and consider certain racial identity development models when working with clients who have experienced this form of trauma. In addition to the model of Sellers and colleagues (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998) mentioned by Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]), we recommend the consideration of (a) Helms's Black racial identity development theory

(Helms, 1990) when counseling African American clients and (b) acculturation issues when counseling Asian American clients (Kim, 2004). Certain clients of color might not recognize that their trauma symptoms are related to their experiences of racism. In these instances, counselors must especially be aware of the possible association and work with clients to address this possible link. Similarly, counselors should consider racial identity development theory (Helms, 1990) and costs of racism to Whites with regard to understanding how White individuals are affected by and respond to racial issues.

Commonalities and differences between racial and ethnic groups should also be considered. Certain reactions to trauma may vary depending on cultural norms within each group. Bryant-Davis and Ocampo (2005 [this issue]) note that clients may present with various posttrauma symptoms. In addition, although progress has been made through each revision, the *DSM-IV-TR* continues to reflect a predominantly Eurocentric orientation. Therefore, we encourage counselors to remain open to additional potential indicators of trauma specific to certain racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and to realize that these might differ between groups.

CONCLUSION

The findings reported in this issue of *The Counseling Psychologist* underscore the need for increased attention to and critical examination of multicultural issues in practice and research, specifically regarding race and racial issues. We elaborated on these findings to further discuss the unique implications for White counselors and researchers. As part of this objective, we discussed the roles and responsibilities of White individuals in addressing these issues and several factors that function as barriers to achieving the goal of moving beyond complacency to commitment. As White individuals, we must move beyond our current level of engagement in how we approach and address race and in turn increase our commitment and involvement in the process of improving our knowledge, awareness, and skills in multicultural counseling research and practice.

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