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● REACTION

White Racial Identity and the Counseling Professional

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I was delighted to read Mio and Iwamasa's (1993 [this issue]) article, which summarized and extended the content of our initial APA symposium (Ponterotto et al., 1990) titled "The White American Researcher in Multicultural Counseling: Significance and Challenges." The article was creatively prepared and generally accurate in its summary of the symposium. Importantly, the article and the brief reaction papers that follow will serve to keep alive an important topic for the counseling profession. This reaction piece is organized into three sections: (a) original rationale for the symposium, (b) a White identity case study: the symposium audience, and (c) recommendations for counseling training.

ORIGINAL RATIONALE FOR THE SYMPOSIUM

It would help readers to review my initial rationale for organizing the symposium. As a White researcher working in the multicultural area, I became aware of two issues receiving little attention in the professional literature.

Issue 1: Do I have a right to do research in this area? It is difficult for White scholars engaged in minority-group research not to feel some level of guilt when they contemplate the collective history of White psychologists' treatment of minority groups. Thomas (1970, p. 52, cited in Sue, 1981) captures well the sentiment felt by some members of the minority community:

White psychologists have raped Black communities all over the country. Yes raped. They have used Black people as the human equivalent of rats run through Ph.D. experiments and as helpless clients for programs that serve middle-class

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white administrators better than they do the poor. They have used research on Black people as green stamps to trade for research grants. They have been vultures. (p. 17)

It is understandable how a White graduate student or new professional reading the Thomas quote may develop mixed feelings about his or her multicultural interest. Some concerns expressed by White multicultural researchers are fear of rejection or intellectual dismissal from minority colleagues and fear of confrontation and challenge from minority subject pools. A major purpose of the symposium was to openly discuss both minority-group and majority-group perceptions of Whites doing minority-focused research. Additionally, it was hoped that the challenges, drawbacks, and benefits of White scholars' involvement in minority-group research would be discussed.

Issue 2: Why is collaboration between White and minority scholars not more common? Another impression I formed about the status of multicultural research was that, by and large, White researchers and minority researchers were seldom working together. Most of the research articles that I reviewed (e.g., Ponterotto & Casas, 1991) were written either by minority scholars or White scholars working separately. I reasoned that to effectively prepare for a multicultural service orientation, counseling psychologists must first look within their own ranks at the current status of interracial communication and collaboration. Therefore, a secondary purpose of the symposium was to discuss the current and future status of interracial collaboration among counseling psychology researchers.

A WHITE IDENTITY CASE STUDY: THE SYMPOSIUM AUDIENCE

A strength of the Mio and Iwamasa (1993) article is the authors' ability to descriptively capture the audience's emotive reaction to the presentations. Consider the following two quotes taken from their article:

Although many in the room felt energized by Dr. Parham's discussion . . . there was a palpable tension in the air, with people of all colors feeling unsettled. During the question-answer segment of the symposium, various audience members' voices were shaking. (p. 205)

It was quite apparent that many White researchers and audience participants felt uncomfortable with Parham's frank discussion of their interest in the area. (p. 209)

Racial identity models can serve to explain these audience reactions. Here we will focus on White racial identity (minority identity models can explain the minority audience's reaction). I do remember many White persons at the well-attended session. First, I will review a recent model of White identity development and then use the model to explain the audience's reaction to the symposium.

White identity theory holds that for White persons to acknowledge and feel comfortable with their identity as White persons in an ethnocentric and racist society, they must experience an identity process and progress through a number of distinct yet interrelated stages. Presently, there are three popular White identity models in the counseling literature (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1990; Ponterotto, 1988). Recently Sabnani, Ponterotto, and Borodovsky (1991) integrated these three identity models into an all-inclusive White identity model targeted for White counselors. The new model consists of five stages as described below.

Stage 1, Pre-Exposure/Pre-Contact, is characterized by a lack of awareness of self as a racial being. White counselors in this stage have not yet begun to explore their own racial identity nor given thought to their role as White people in an oppressive society.

Stage 2, Conflict, involves an expansion of knowledge with regard to racial matters stimulated by interactions with minority individuals or by information gathered elsewhere (e.g., a multicultural symposium, independent reading). This new knowledge challenges White counselors to acknowledge their Whiteness and examine their own cultural values. This stage is highlighted by conflict between wanting to conform to majority-group norms and wishing to uphold humanistic, egalitarian values. Key affective components of the Conflict stage are confusion, guilt, anxiety, anger, and depression.

Stage 3, Pro-Minority/Anti-Racism, serves as one of two outlets used by White counselors to deal with the emotional upheaval of the previous stage. Counselors may begin to develop a strong pro-minority stance, and they begin to resist racism. Sabnani et al. (1991) note that this response alleviates the strong guilt and confusion characteristic of the previous stage.

Stage 4, Retreat into White culture, marks another potential response to Stage 2 emotions. At this point, instead of identifying with minority-group members, White counselors respond to Conflict stage emotions by withdrawing from interracial situations. This response may result in White counselors' attempting to avoid multicultural counseling courses/symposia and preferring to work with White clients.

Stage 5, Redefinition and Integration, marks that point when counselors achieve a healthy balance with regard to racial identity. They are aware of

their Whiteness and acknowledge their responsibility in perpetuating a racist status quo. They also can identify with positive aspects of White culture and they express interest in learning about other cultures.

The Sabnani et al. (1991) model can be used to understand the audience's reaction as captured by Mio and Iwamasa (1993). It appears that a number of White people at the symposium were in the Conflict stage. Counselors in the Conflict stage initially feel energized by their newfound knowledge. Many people in the audience were hearing for the first time the feelings of some minority scholars toward White researchers in the field. The quotes above also reveal the feelings of discomfort and anxiety, also common reactions in the conflict stage. In all probability, there were also White panel members and audience members represented in a number of stages, but it was the strong emotion characteristic of the Conflict stage that caught Mio and Iwamasa's attention.

According to the Sabnani et al. (1991) model, White counselors in the Conflict stage react in one of two ways. Some may feel guilty as they learn the realities of continuing racism and attempt to alleviate this guilt by entering Stage 3—Pro-Minority/Anti-Racism. Other counselors will attempt to deal with the unpleasant emotions of the conflict stage by entering Stage 4—Retreat into the White culture—therefore retreating into the comfort and familiarity of working primarily with White colleagues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COUNSELING TRAINING

Mio and Iwamasa's (1993) recollections provide evidence that a significant number of session participants were in the lower and middle stages of racial identity development. This perception is consistent with evaluations of counseling training programs in general (see insightful discussions by D'Andrea & Daniels, 1991; Mio & Morris, 1990). An important consideration for counseling training programs is the extent to which they provide an environment facilitative of racial identity development. For White counselors (and minority counselors) to develop a healthy racial identity (see research summarized in Helms, 1990), they must be exposed to culturally diverse professors, peers, administrators, and a multicultural curriculum. Progression through stages of identity is dependent on interracial interaction and discussion. Recent research on racial identity development is providing counseling training programs with insightful directions for program development.

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