

Counseling and diversity

[Science](#), [Anthropology](#)



Counseling and Diversity Liberty University Brandi McCain Abstract People of different cultures seem to differ from past generations in that they seek to retain many of their cultural values and are less interested in becoming regulated within the U. S. culture. This distinctness can create a potentially complex situation for both the client and counselor who may differ substantially in their own cultural values. For successful therapy to take place, it is important for counselors to be culturally sensitive of clients and avoid stereotyping. To minimize the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpreting our clients we should acknowledge the influence of culture and respond respectfully to these cultural differences, values, and beliefs. This paper will define counseling and diversity and its disparities as well as address five cultural aspects that affect the counseling profession. Ethical, religious, legal, socioeconomic status and cultural values all greatly affects various measures of multicultural counseling. Introduction Due to the changing demographics of society, as well as a growing awareness that race, ethnicity, and culture are central to understanding the experience of every individual, there has been a crusade to make counseling and diversity more inclusive. “ In fact, some psychologists have gone so far as to state that if the field of psychology does not break from being an unbiased science with an ethnocentric focus on European American psychology, it risks becoming “ culturally obsolete” (George William, 2001). Sensitivity to counseling diverse groups of people is essential. There are three serious errors that can be made in multicultural counseling. “ The first error is overemphasizing similarities, which leads to a melting pot in which the majority prevails over minorities, trivializing cultural identity. ” “ The second error is over-

emphasizing differences, which leads to stereotyping and hostile disengagement, disregarding the need for common ground. " " The third error is to assume that one must emphasize either similarities or differences. " To remedy this, Locke states " that counselors should increase self-awareness and develop significant knowledge and understanding of other cultures and their distinctions. " Locke(1993) According to the U. S. Bureau of the Census (2010), 43% of U. S. citizens identify as an ethnicity that is not Caucasian. ¹ Specifically, 16% of citizens classify themselves as Latino, 13% as African American, 3. 2% as Asian, 5% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 5. 5% as other races, and 2. 4% as multiracial. Hence, the need to become culturally sensitive in the counseling field is immense. The minority population grew in every region significantly between 2000 and 2010; therefore, multicultural counseling is not a very old concept. In past decades, a minority seeking a counselor for help with a mental or relationship issue was very uncommon. In fact, multicultural counseling has only become an important factor in the counseling field in the past 35 or 40 years. Discrimination and inequality used to be very prevalent in the counseling field, and has instigated many organizations and associations. One such association began as the association for non-white concerns in personnel and Guidance and is now called the Association for multicultural counseling and development. " AMCD is now celebrating more than thirty-five years of service to the helping professions, their founders and leaders employ all members to continue promoting appreciation, awareness and understanding of the unique cultures of their mosaic society. " AMCD (2012) - The individual most identified as leading the founding of ANWC is Samuel H. Johnson of

Atlanta, Georgia. He was a minority who had a vision to break barriers of racism in the field of counseling and psychology. " The mission of the organization, from the beginning, was to recognize human diversity and multicultural nature of our society; to enhance the development, human rights and the psychological health of all people as critical to the social, educational, political, professional and personal reform in the United States; to identify and work to eliminate conditions which create barriers to the individual development of non-whites; to develop, implement and/or foster interest in charitable, scientific and educational programs designed to further the interests of non-whites; to secure equality of treatment, advancement, qualifications and status individuals in Personnel and guidance work; to publish a journal and other scientific educational and professional materials with the purpose of raising the standards of all who work in guidance and counseling. " AMCD (2012) Religious Aspects " In this modern pluralistic age, ignorance of the bible is pervasive; knowledge of the gospel is becoming so rare and weak that we are becoming a planet of Theo-illiterates. " Clinton (2004) Understanding the role of religion in a multicultural context is pertinent for the counseling profession. A bridge has been drawn to create an alliance between religion and the counseling field. Professionals realize that religion drives many cultural philosophies. Research has indicated that religious clients expect religious attitudes, values, and behaviors to be a focus in counseling, regardless of whether the counselor is identified as religious or secular. Although extensive research has identified the need for counselors to be aware of the religious and spiritual needs of clients clearly identify the role of religion in understanding

cultural diversity. Thus, it is not only important to focus on the manner in which spirituality and religion affect clients (Gaithri, 2012)), it is equally crucial to explore how religion and spirituality are integrated into the theory and practice of delivering counseling services (Bland, 2005). Allmond (2009) suggested that there is a tendency among highly religious people to perceive themselves as having stronger moral attributes than nonreligious people have. Such bias by a highly religious counselor could complicate the counseling relationship. Jesus taught that one of the two greatest commandments is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12: 31) To love and serve all people is one of Christianity's highest values, as expressed in the children's Sunday school song, "red, and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight." Clinton (2011) Legal and Ethical Aspects Counselors and therapists, like other professionals, have established codes of ethics to guide them in the practice of helping others. The ethical standards of the ACA and the AACC are the primary resources for counselors when they face ethical dilemmas. Acting ethically is not always easy, comfortable, or clear. In making an ethical decision, counselors rely on professional values as well as ethical standards and legal precedents. Counselors also consult professional colleagues, supervisors, and principles. It is imperative that counselors become well informed in the area of ethics for the sake of their own well-being and that of their clients. It is not enough to have an academic knowledge of ethical standards; counselors must also have a working knowledge and be able to assess the developmental level at which they and their colleagues are operating. Ethical standards and legal codes reflect current conditions and are ever-evolving documents. They do

not cover all situations, but they do offer guidance beyond counselors' personal beliefs and values. As time goes on more complex situations will arise, making ethical and legal aspects of counseling become more complicated in the future, and enforcement procedures become stricter. No practicing counselor should be ignorant of ethics or the law. In addition, counselors must be informed about state and national legislation and legal decisions, for these will affect the ways in which they work. " Counselors are liable for civil and criminal malpractice if they violate client rights or societal rules. " Young (1989) " One way for counselors to protect themselves legally is to follow the ethical standards of the professional organizations with which they are affiliated and operate according to recognized practices. " Young (1989) Counselors must be able to justify what they do and they should also carry malpractice insurance There are different aspects of ethnicity to consider also such as Sexuality, Gender, Race and culture. There is no doubt counselors have to be aware of the complications when it comes to culture. Within a culture people develop patterns of behavior that they have learned. Cultural identity differences can be perceived between themselves and other groups and can also be based on personal preferences i. e. language, religion, lifestyle, birthplace or even life experiences. " There is a danger that if counselors minimize cultural differences they are likely to impose the larger multicultural groups similarities upon the smaller multicultural groups and uphold one group as being more important than the other. " Pederson (1996). " Over-emphasizing the differences may result in difficulty finding common ground upon which to build the counseling relationship. " Malley, Reilly (1999). A counselor should maintain a balance by recognizing the

importance of the similarities and differences, and understand them, build a good communication and counseling relationship. Pederson (1996). Without cultural awareness counselors may engage in faulty information processing that they may limit the client to fair counseling. Socioeconomic Aspects Factors such as educational, economic background and family structure affect how a particular individual or group of individuals think, process and react and respond to any given situation. Traditionally, research has measured socioeconomic inequality in terms of education, occupation, or income. Characteristics such as, income level, education, and occupation can influence a counselors' cognitive and emotional reactions. Socioeconomic status exists as a part of an individual's identity. " It also effects how we perceive success in economic and social terms it has the capacity to influence and be influenced by other identity characteristics, and it affects the overall quality of people's lives. "Gaithri (2012) Dougall maintains that the " existence of social class is a fundamental factor underlying many problems counselors must face. " Recognition of the importance of social class can contribute greatly to solving the problems that confront counselors. The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics serves as an ethical guide designed to assist members in constructing a professional course of action that best serves those utilizing counseling services and best promotes the counseling profession. In Section A. 10. b " Counselors are to consider the financial status of clients and locality. In the event that the established fee structure is inappropriate for a client, counselors should assist clients in attempting to find comparable services of acceptable cost. The AACC maintains that Christian counselors are free, within the bounds of biblical,

professional and community standards to set their own fees. Clinicians are encouraged, however, to use sliding fee schedules, scaled to client's ability to pay and other reduced payment methods to increase counseling accessibility to those of lesser financial means. Cultural Values Cultural values play a significant role in the treatment of minorities. Failure to incorporate values into treatment might result in higher attrition rates and possibly less efficacious treatment. " Counselors working with minority groups must become familiar with the subtle nuances of their cultural values and explore how these values may or may not be influencing the course of treatment with the person over time. " Bishop (1992) When possible, practitioners should incorporate them into their treatment plans in order to provide the most effective and culturally sensitive treatment to individuals or groups. If clients are likely to assume values similar to those they attribute to a counselor, then extra monitoring on the clinician's part would be necessary to make certain that his or her values were not improperly inflicted on the client. Counselors, raised in a specific culture with a specific set of values, tend to select and employ a counseling design that is suited to our own personality and beliefs. An incompatible counseling design will introduce a particular value conflict both for the counselor as well as the client. The counselor's awareness of the client's cultural experiences and values in the counseling process is essential. Values should be used as criteria for decision making. Different expectations of life exist and depend on cultural values. One would also assume that a counselor will be less facilitative with those clients whose behavior he/she regards as morally wrong or whose values he regards as ill-matched with his own. Although, Langberg (2011) states that

all good shepherds are, first and foremost, lambs. The shepherd who is not first a lamb will be arrogant and proud and damage those he or she has been called to tend. Being judgmental is precisely the kind of behavior that places culturally different people in socially unacceptable positions even though they are acculturated. The fact remains that the principles of race prevents assimilation. Therefore, value congruence is very significant and desirable.

Discussion The five aspects that have been discussed in this paper play a big role in the counseling profession. Much of the research on multicultural counseling is new because until recently inequalities and discrimination in this field were not heavily addressed. Counseling is a conversational process that can be instrumental in the development of skills that help those effectively confront and cope with uncertainties and conflicts. Counseling is for individuals who are courageously facing their fears, who want more from their life, who want to expand their lives and achieve goals both personally and professionally. However, the present multicultural composition of our society is indicative of the need for training counselors to meet this challenge of working with clients who believe in and practice a totally different set of cultural value system. If we want to meet the challenge of treating clients from different cultural backgrounds than ourselves, counselors must study, learn and understand cultural systems and values of different clients. Counselors should also be trained in cross cultural communication so that they can effectively and convincingly connect with their clients. Another important skill counselors need to acquire the ability to appropriately and accurately send and receive both verbal and non-verbal messages. Counselors should understand not only different cultural

standards and values but also understand and respect the religious system that each culture follows. A clients' level of religion and/or spirituality, affects how they assess distressful situations in their life by offering a meaning of life and providing individuals with a greater sense of control over complex situations. Counselors should require pay for their services but not take advantage of a client's ability to pay or not. Widespread unemployment has infected this country. The outcome of this affects individuals to pay for counseling services, which are needed more often now due to the depression that may have set in for individuals who cannot make an honest living. It is often seen that under these circumstances, individual's survival has to be ensured before thinking about the integrity of the family. Priorities get changed. The developed world and the third world bear little difference so far as these sections of the society are concerned. References American Counseling Association (2005). ACA Code of Ethics. Alexandria, VA: American Association of Christian Counselors (2004) AACC Code of Ethics(2001) Retrieved from <http://www.uslegal.com> Corey , G., Corey, M. S., & Callanan, P. (2011). Issues and ethics in the helping professions. (8 ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Clinton, T., & Ohlschlager, G. (2011). Competent Christian Counseling, volume one, foundations and practice of compassionate soul care. New York: Waterbrook Press U. S. Census Bureau. (2010). Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010/>. Dougall, J. (2010). Influence of client socioeconomic status counselors attributuional biases & objectives countertransference reactions. Journal of Counseling and Development. Gaithri, F. (2012). Review of Counseling and Diversity. Cultural Diversity &

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