

Social and Cultural Diversity Paper

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Introduction

The world is filled with such beauty and innovation because of its diversity. Every individual has their own perspectives, values, beliefs and attitudes that stem from their culture. Cultural diversity is defined as the existence of various cultural and ethnic groups within a society. In counseling, “cultural diversity protects us from imposing our self-reference criteria inappropriately by challenging our assumptions” (Pedersen, 2002 pg. 8). In order for a counselor to be legally and ethically competent, they must be able to work with diverse clientele. This means they will need to be aware of any personal biases and gain knowledge of different cultures (Pedersen, 2002). This composition will reflect my personal biases and experiences regarding different cultures. It will also examine different concepts of racism, the importance of cultural diversity and how I can improve my own multicultural competency.

PART 1

Reflection on Cultural Personal Biases

Awareness is one of the basic competencies for culturally responsive counseling. This implies that in order to be a competent counselor, one must be aware of their own cultural values and biases (Jones-Smith, 2019, pg. 7). Every individual has biases, whether they are conscious or subconscious. When a counselor is aware of their own cultural background, experiences, values and biases, they understand how these concepts can impact the delivery of counseling services (Jones-Smith, 2019). For example, within my culture, when individuals are seen holding hands or being affectionate towards each other, this is usually a clear indication that they are in an intimate relationship. However, there are some cultures in which these actions are a sign of friendship and closeness. In the Arab culture, it is acceptable and common for those of the same gender to hold hands to show friendship (Jones-Smith, 2019). My personal bias could lead to

falsely interpreting a relationship the client has. Not only could this offend or harm the client, but it would ultimately ruin the counseling relationship.

Experiences With Discrimination

One of the most important aspects of awareness is acknowledging any experiences of your cultural background (Jones-Smith, 2019). This includes dramatic experiences such as discrimination and racism. My first experience with racism happened when I entered into the third grade. I had developed a relationship with a White European American girl who had invited me to her residence for a playdate. At this time, she was living with her grandparents. On our way to her home, she had warned me not to reveal that I was African American. At that young age, I did understand the concept of race and ethnicity. However, I did not understand why hiding my race was important. When we arrived at her home, the first thing my friend exclaims to her grandmother is “Grandma, this is my friend, she is Mexican not black.” Her grandmother did look mortified and embarrassed by her announcement. Her grandmother even replied by stating “Even if she was black, there is nothing wrong with that.”

When I returned home, I told my father about what I had experienced. That is when he explained the concept of racism and discrimination. It was a hard topic to understand and comprehend. My family identified as Christian’s and were very family oriented. They were also very accepting of others regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation. With that experience of racism and now learning about discrimination, I would go on being afraid to tell my other White European American friends that I was African American.

Experience With Different Cultures

One of my experiences with a new culture was with my childhood friend’s family who is Jordanian. The first few times I had spent with my friend’s family, I noticed that her

grandmother would not make any eye contact with me or even acknowledge my presence. The times that she did look at me, she never smiled. Both of my grandmothers are very warm and welcoming. They are sociable to where it is common for them to hug someone when they first meet them. I was so used to this type of behavior from my grandmothers, I assumed my friend's grandmother did not like me. My friend explained to me that many of her older family members behaved this way. It was not because she didn't like me, but because I was a stranger to her. Until her grandmother got to know me in depth, she would most likely continue to ignore me. These cultural differences resulted in me developing a wrong assumption. This experience has helped me become aware of how making assumptions based on my cultural experiences can lead to false assumptions.

Life Experiences Affecting Ability To Relate

My life experiences have taught me that each person has their own views and perspectives because of cultural differences. Because of my experiences, I am able to understand and accept other people's perspectives and values more effectively. I can also show empathy by trying to relate to them with similar experiences I've had. For example, my life experience of my parents' divorce has help me related to many others going through the same experience. Even though we are of different cultures, I am able to empathize and understand what they are going through because of my similar experience.

PART 2

Subtle Racism

Most of modern society sees racism as "bad" and unacceptable. So, blatant expressions of racism have declined significantly. However, a modern form of racism has developed that is more distant and indirect, known as subtle racism (Liao, Hong, & Rounds, 2016). The increase

of education has helped individuals “read signs of the time.” This has made people become careful of how their racist views are expressed (Hagendoorn and Nekuee, 2018). Subtle racism can be shown in the form of stereotyping, racial profiling or providing bad services to a specific racial group (Liao, Hong, & Rounds, 2016). For example, a store clerk tries to covertly follow an African American male around because they feel they are going to steal something. The African American male was not exhibiting any suspicious behavior, but because they were “black” the clerk thinks they are going to steal. This is a common form of subtle racism seen in today’s society.

PART 3

Importance Of The Aca Code Of Ethics

One of the core values of the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of ethics is “honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts” (American Counseling Association, 2014, pg. 3). This code of conduct emphasizes the importance of fostering fairness and equality no matter the client’s cultural, race or ethnicity. In order to be ethically and legally competent in my future practice, the concepts of the ACA code of ethics must be implemented. For example, counselors are responsible for communicating information to their client that is culturally appropriate. If a client is having difficulty understanding, counselors must provide necessary services such as arranging an interpreter or translator (American Counseling Association, 2014, A.2.c). The code of ethics also highlights that counselors must be aware of the client’s cultural meaning of confidentiality and privacy. This means counselors must respect the client’s view towards disclosure of information (American Counseling Association, 2014, B.1.a).

Cultural Sensitivity In Treatment Planning

Cultural sensitivity is important when it comes to treatment planning and assessment techniques. This is because a client's age, color, culture, disability, ethnic group, gender, race, language preference, religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status has an effect on test administration and interpretation. So, it is important for counselors to take account these factors when establishing a proper treatment plan. For example, a counselor could develop a treatment plan that has been successful for their other clients. So, they assign that same treatment plan for their current client. However, the treatment plan may go against their religious views or cultural customs.

Developing Rapport Strategies With Diverse Clients

It is imperative for counselors to develop specific skills to work with diverse clients. Counselors are going to be working with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. So, each client will have their own perceptions of eye contact, body language, verbal tracking, open-ended questioning, paraphrasing and summarizing (LeBeauf, Smaby & Maddux, 2009). This is why becoming educated with different cultures, values, and customs is so important for building rapport with and maintaining a strong therapeutic alliance. For example, direct eye contact, demonstrative body language and continue verbal tracking is seen as impolite in the Asian American culture. Also, Native Americans who maintain strong bonds with their tribal groups feel eye contact, direct questions, repetitive phrasing and summarizing is invasive (LeBeauf, Smaby & Maddux, 2009). Counselors can use this information to make sure they avoid these behaviors while working with individuals from these groups. This will decrease the chances of unintentionally offending the client and increase the likelihood of developing rapport.

Informational Resources On Cultural Diversity

One of the most influential resources that will improve my cultural competency is the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS) multicultural training database. The database provides collections of syllabi, videos, experimental activities, mentorship opportunities and other diversity-related material to enhance potential counselor's diversity competencies (American Psychological Association, 2020). This resources will help me overcome my current biases and become aware of new biases I did not know I had. Another resources that will help diminish my current biases is the "Multicultural Counseling Video Series" (American Psychological Association, 2020). This collection gives vital information on how to work with specific cultural groups. For my personal biases, the videos I would find most useful is "Working With Asian American Clients" with Jean Lau Chin, EdD and "Working With Arab Americans" Naji Abi-Hashem, PhD (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Applying Learning Experiences In Future Practice

Having an understanding and awareness of my own biases will assist me in delivering quality counseling services. When I am aware of my own biases, I can ensure they do not influence my views and assumptions towards the client. Being able to learn about the practices, customs and values of other cultures will make sure I am being polite and respectful based on the client's cultural norms. For example, in Asian, Middle Eastern and Native American cultures consistent eye contact can be disrespectful or rude. This knowledge will allow me to build rapport with clients from these cultural groups and create a positive counseling relationship.

Conclusion

Becoming self-aware of my own personal biases has helped me developed a course of action to diminish them. To be successful, I must be willing to educate myself on different

cultures and adopt all cultural diversity concepts in the ACA Code of Ethics. When a counselor is more accepting towards the diversity of the client, the client is more likely to trust them. That trust manifests itself into a therapeutic alliance. A successful counselor is adaptable. They are able to converse and build rapport with diverse clients in order to help them progress in their therapeutic journey.

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