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Multicultural Counseling Course Instructors' Cultural Background and Diversity Teaching Approaches

Abstract

Abstract

The success of any multicultural counseling course hinges upon the cultural competence of the course instructor. Research indicates that cultural competence is developed through personal experiences with diversity; however, little is known about how these experiences are translated into teaching practice. In this qualitative study, the researcher used a phenomenological inquiry to explore how instructors' experiences with diversity influence how they teach multicultural counseling. The main thematic finding indicates that the cultural diversity background of the counselor educators shapes the way they teach. The two subthemes also reveal that some instructors teach diversity topics from a place of familiarity and comfortability, while others teach from areas they describe as cultural deficits. Implications of this study are useful to inform multicultural counselor education and training.

Keywords

Multicultural counseling course, diversity training, cultural diversity, counselor education, cultural competence

Multicultural counseling is referred to as the “fourth force” within the field of counseling, behind humanism, behaviorism, and psychodynamic theory, because of the great significance of understanding culture and its impact on behavior (Fleuridas & Krafcik, 2019, p. 1). The field of counseling demonstrates increasing awareness and sensitivity towards cultural constructs such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and ableism, and the ways in which these factors may contribute to clients’ difficulties (Beagan, 2018). Multiculturalism is birthed from a postmodernism paradigm that allows for the critical examination of beliefs and assumptions established as truths or realities of a society. This ideology reinforces the recognition of existing complexities, relativity, and inter-subjectivity of individuals’ experiences (Ash & Wiggan, 2018). Multicultural counseling competence is considered a central component of the counseling profession (ACA, 2015), and have recently expanded to include social justice advocacy to further identify the multicultural competent counselor as an agent of social change (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020).

Researchers have outlined that the exponential growth of cultures within America necessitate that counseling professionals understand and address certain cultural impacts on mental health, such as how health and illnesses are perceived; treatment-seeking patterns; and the impacts of racism, bias, stereotyping, gender, family stigma, and discrimination (Gopalkrishnan & Babacan, 2015; Matthews et al., 2018). Currently, ethnic and racial minorities within the U.S. have greater exposure than Caucasian Americans to discrimination, violence, and poverty, all of which have been linked to mental illnesses (Eylem et al., 2020). Other cultural and racial minority groups, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals experience many challenges when seeking mental health services (Antebi-Gruszka, 2022; Frost, 2017). Some of these challenges include perceived negative attitudes from counselors who do not

share their cultural values and worldviews, inappropriate treatment modalities and underutilization of mental health services (Soto et al., 2019). With all these issues that racial and cultural minorities face, it has become pertinent for counseling training institutions to focus on developing effective multicultural counseling competence training programs that thoroughly prepare counseling students to provide culturally appropriate mental health services (Sue, 2016; Swank & Houseknecht, 2019).

The American Counseling Association (ACA), the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) continue to provide multicultural competence standards as guidelines for multicultural training, as well as assessment of multicultural training outcomes (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2016; MSJCC, 2015). Furthermore, ACA Code of Ethics suggests the integration of material related to multiculturalism/ diversity throughout all courses and workshops for the development of professional counselors (ACA, 2014, Standard F.7.c.). In addition, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has included social and cultural diversity as one of eight focus areas for counseling training curriculums (CACREP, 2016, Section 2, Standard F.2.). However, researchers conclude that what comprises appropriate and effective training can be subjective and often differs across institutions (Mollen & Ridley, 2021; Tomlinson-Clarke, 2013).

The multicultural counseling competence trainings are usually structured using a separate or single course, and/or infused across the curriculum intended to have multicultural topics integrated within all areas of counselor education training (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020). Findings from studies examining the effectiveness of the structures of these trainings yielded mixed results. Some studies have reported that counseling students receiving training through the combination of

both a single course and an infused curriculum reported higher levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills, than those who received training through either a single course or an infused curriculum only (Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020; Kerne, & McCarthy, 2013). Conversely, other studies showed that counseling students who received only a single course training reported greater openness and comfort working with diverse population than those who received training only through an infused curriculum (Celinska & Swazo, 2016; Gonzalez-Voller et al., 2020; Pieterse et al, 2009). In a recent study Dameron et al. (2020) highlighted that school counselors in training who participated in an infused multicultural counseling competence curriculum reported a higher perceived awareness, knowledge, and skills in comparison to others receiving training through a single MC course (Dameron et al., 2020). Reviews from the literature also suggest that many training programs implement a single course design as part of CACREP's core curriculum (Collins et al., 2015; Dameron et al., 2020). This research focuses on multicultural counseling competence instructors' experiences who are responsible for teaching a single course.

The multicultural counseling competence instructor (MCCI) sets the tone for the delivery of the diversity course due to the level of autonomy they are given in the course preparation (Smith et al., 2017; Yoon, 2014). As a result, the cultural background of the multicultural counseling course instructor is significant. The instructors' backgrounds and worldviews have some bearing on their level of comfort, ability to project, and competence in teaching their course (Brion, 2021; Tomlinson- Clarke, 2013). Therefore, an exploration of the perceptions of MCCIs has the potential to provide an understanding of the influence of instructors' backgrounds and/or life experiences on interactions within their assigned role as a diversity course instructor.

Multicultural counseling competence goes beyond having knowledge of other cultures. It speaks to understanding the complex processes through which individuals construct their own

worldviews, attitudes, values and norms as members of their communities and societies (Hays, 2020). MCCIs' understanding of their cultural backgrounds can assist them in making education a more meaningful experience by thoroughly understanding their own cultural identities and biases and the impact they have on the beliefs and educational experience of all students (Pieterse et al., 2015).

This understanding is necessary to provide authentic and meaningful teaching and learning experiences, which help to improve the multicultural competence training and enhance the cultural climate in the classrooms (Matthews, 2018). What has been illustrated through studies is that (a) students posit that the cultural experiences and background of instructors make a difference in the multicultural education courses (Maged, 2014; Smith et al., 2017); (b) instructors' cultural awareness may influence how they teach (Pieterse et al., 2015); (c) prior experiences with marginalization impact one's level of cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (Matthews, 2018); and (d) having awareness of one's competence can lead to assessment and training that could improve areas in need of development (Tatum, 2019).

Furthermore, the academic community has extensively investigated students' experiences with multicultural courses, including their perception of the multicultural instructor's cultural identity and its impact on learning outcomes (Brion, 2021; Han et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2017). However, there is a paucity of information in relation to counselor educators' cultural experiences and their role as multicultural course instructors, though several of the following studies provide perspective on this topic.

In a qualitative study, Marge (2014) found that mostly White instructors of a diversity course reported that they did not think race or ethnicity mattered. However, the students mentioned the cultural background of instructors impacting their growth and development in cultural

competence skills and shared that the trainings they received from instructors who identified with the dominant culture were highly theoretical and provided them with less practical knowledge. A more recent study demonstrated that White college professors reported feelings of uncertainty, guilt, and defensiveness when teaching about race and racism in college diversity courses, specifically to students identified in marginalized racial group. The participants shared that they perceived the students' responses to them teaching about race and racism was parallel to how they felt. Students reminded professors that they experienced the world through a very White lens (Smith et al., 2017). Additionally, in another study, Curtis-Boles et al., (2020) found that Faculty of Color teaching diversity courses at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) reported experiences of devaluation, invalidation, racial stereotypes, and unchallenged racial statements from students. These studies support the notion that the background of the instructors who are teaching cultural diversity courses matters to the students.

In another earlier study, Pope and Mueller (2005) administered a nationwide survey and found that faculty members who experienced oppression and discrimination in relation to their own identity were more likely to have a deeper knowledge of multicultural issues and rate themselves higher on self-report measures of multicultural counseling competence. For instance, those who were of color scored higher than Whites; those who identified as "homosexual" scored higher than "heterosexual"; and women scored higher than men. Pope and Mueller also explored five basic experiential variables: teaching a multicultural course, conducting multicultural research, multicultural professional development, designing multicultural programs, and implementing multicultural policies; all of which were found to be strong predictors of higher self-reported multicultural counseling competence. Although these findings are exploratory, they signify a need to further examine and understand the interaction between demographic and

experiential characteristics and how they relate to multicultural counseling competence.

Researchers have concluded that teaching philosophy is often influenced by two things: where teachers come from, which includes how and what they have been previously taught; and where they are presently, which is what they now know, believe and value (Brion, 2021; Wheeler & Baker, 2010). Studies have reported that Black teachers, when compared to White teachers, defined teaching from a more empathetic perspective and were considered overly protective of their students. They further reported that this perspective derived from their racial or cultural background (McKinney de Royston, 2021).

Similarly, Han, et al. (2011) found that the White racial identity of teachers, and their limited experience with diversity, restricted how they taught in a culturally diverse classroom. These teachers ignored students of different racial backgrounds and took a color-blind approach, ignoring the importance of multicultural education, and denying their personal social influence on students. However, teachers who had been exposed to cultural diversity prior to working at the school planned for the culturally diverse students and shared a positive immersion experience in which they were the minority and students of color were in the majority. These teachers also reported that they would always address discriminatory comments inside as well as outside the classroom. They expressed having a high level of contact with others that are racially/culturally different from them prior to becoming a teaching. Individual's cultural background is an important factor in the reality they construct with others. How instructors' use their cultural identities to interact with students and the subject matter could affect classroom dynamics and student learning outcomes.

Purpose of Study

The success of multicultural counseling training hinges upon the cultural competence and

experience of the counselor educators assigned to teach on multicultural counseling competence (Sue, 2016). Researchers have recommended that for counselor educators to develop the cultural competence necessary to effectively teach on cultural diversity topics, they must first reflect on their own cultural identity development and consider how their perspectives could influence their teaching and interaction with students (Gonzales-Voller, 2022; Han et al., 2011; Sue, 2016). Despite this recommendation, existing literature exploring counselor educators' perceptions of how prior experiences with diversity have impacted the ways they teach the multicultural counseling curriculum has been limited. The purpose of this study is to fill this critical research gap by understanding how a diverse group of MCCIs perceived their prior experiences with diversity as impacting their teaching approaches.

Methods

Theoretical Framework

Social Construction Theory (SCT) is considered to be an effective framework in understanding, explaining, and addressing cultural issues (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Because it is contextually focused, SCT recognizes and explains the significant role that culture, and environment play in human development and behaviors (Dombrowski, 2020). Through the lens of SCT, this researcher examined how participants' life experiences with diversity influenced how they taught the multicultural counseling course. This included how and where they gained knowledge and understanding of diversity, and how they translated this meaning-making process in the creation and execution of their multicultural courses. SCT posits that behaviors become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of the individual (Bartmanski, 2018). By exploring this context, the researcher developed an understanding of participants' behaviors in relation to their environment. Moreover, participants also understood the role their context played

in shaping their behaviors in relation to multicultural issues.

Qualitative and Phenomenological Inquiry

To research the question how MCCIs' experiences with diversity have shaped the way in which they teach, the researcher used a qualitative design embedded in a phenomenological inquiry. The purpose of phenomenological approach is to explain the meaning, structure and lived experience of an individual or a group of persons concerning a particular phenomenon (Moran, 2018). There is also a strong relationship between phenomenology and SCT because they are both concerned with how the world appears to a person or group based on their viewpoint and experience of a certain phenomenon (Seidman, 2013). Moustakas (1994) developed phenomenological theory and believed that experience and behavior are viewed as integrated and inseparable in relation to a phenomenon and the person experiencing the phenomenon. Therefore, a person's experience will influence how they make meaning of their experiences, navigate their space, and view their behaviors that reflect the phenomenon.

Participants

Participants included six counselor educators who had previously taught or were teaching the master's level multicultural counseling course at the time of the study. Two of the participants identified as female, and the other four as male. Pseudonyms were used for participants in order to protect their identity. Below, a brief description of the participants is given.

Sarah identified as female, White, Catholic, and between the ages of 36-40 years old. Sarah was a final year PhD counselor educator candidate and an adjunct instructor who taught the MCC course three times over the period of three years. She described her cultural diversity experiences while growing up to be very limited. Sarah worked as a school counselor in the K-12 education system for over 12 years and has taught as an adjunct counselor educator for over five years.

Andrea, the other female participant, identified as Black and Protestant Christian. She was between the ages of 46-50 years, and an immigrant. She held the status as an assistant professor and taught the MCC course over eight times. Andrea was an educator for 16 years; but a counselor educator for eight years. She considered her earlier years to be filled with diverse cultural exposure.

David identified as a Black male, immigrant, Catholic Christian and between 51-55 years of age. He was an associate professor, taught the MCC course over eight times, and had been a counselor educator for eight years at the time of the study. David stated that he grew up in a multi-ethnic environment and was exposed to a variety of cultural ethnic groups (350 different ethnic groups).

Blake identified as African American male and a Baptist Christian, between the ages of 41-45 years old. He was an associate professor and taught the course over eight times. He recalled his earlier years exposing him to both Black and White culture. He lived and grew up in a Black neighborhood with his family; however, he attended private Catholic institutions that were predominantly White (where often he was the only Black student).

Trevor identified as a White male, an immigrant, Catholic, and between the ages of 41-45. He was an assistant professor, taught the MCC course four times and worked as a counselor educator for six years. He described his earlier exposure to cultural diversity as minimal.

Lastly, Sam identified as male of mixed-race (Chinese and Indian), an immigrant, a Baptist Christian and between ages of 31-35 years old. He was an assistant professor and had taught the course two times. He described his family as very religious. He considered his earlier years to be filled with great exposure to cultural diversity because he grew up in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious community and had lived in three different countries.

Setting and Recruitment

Participants were recruited from various CACREP counselor-training institutions located within a 100-mile radius of a medium-size city in the Northeast. The 100-miles distance was selected for cost efficiency and travel convenience; each participant was interviewed three times and in person. The CACREP-accredited institution was selected because they required accredited counseling training programs to include multicultural counseling training in their programs. Eight CACREP accredited institutions were identified. Fourteen counselor educators who taught multicultural counseling courses were identified by their counseling department website. Having identified these instructors, the researcher sent a detailed email introducing and inviting them to participate in the study. Participants were asked to complete a demographic survey attached to the invitation email if they were interested in the study. A total of eight participants responded favorably to participate in the study; six of these participated in the interview process. Of the six represented institutions, five of these universities were private and one public, three were religiously affiliated, and five were considered PWI.

The inclusion criteria for the study were counselor educators who taught or were teaching the MCC course. They had to have developed or revised the MCC syllabus. They also had to be teaching at a CACREP accredited institution, because the MCC course was required for all CACREP accredited counseling training institutions. The exclusion criteria were MCCIs who taught at non-CACREP accredited institutions and MCCIs who adopted an existing syllabus and taught the course without modification.

Data Collection

The data collection sources included three in-depth interviews per participant, a demographic questionnaire, reviewing of the multicultural counseling course syllabus, and

researcher memos written throughout the research. Multiple types of data sources were used to allow for data source triangulation (Creswell, 2017).

Demographic Questionnaire

The study participants were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire prior to conducting the interviews. The questionnaire asked participants about gender, age, race/ethnicity, job title and position, highest degree attained, number of years as a counselor educator, number of years teaching the MCC course, how they got to teach the course and about syllabus modification.

In-depth Interview

A three-part in-depth interview was conducted for each of the six participants. The researcher utilized an established structure for the three-part interview method recommended by Seidman (2013) in order to explore the main research question: how MCCIs' experiences with diversity have shaped the way in which they teach. All interviews were done in person. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, which allowed time for participants to reconstruct their experience, understand their experience in the context of their lives, and reflect on meaning making (Seidman, 2013). The first interview explored each participant's history with diversity prior to teaching the course. The second interview, consistent with the phenomenological interview, was dedicated to participants' present experiences with diversity, focusing specifically on their experiences teaching the course. In the third and final interview, participants were asked how they perceived past experiences with diversity to impact the ways in which they taught the multicultural counseling course.

The questions that guided the three-part-interviews were: (a) What are your experiences with cultural diversity prior to teaching the multicultural course? (b) Describe your experiences as instructor of the multicultural counseling course; and (c) How do your past experiences impact

how you teach the multicultural counseling course? The recommended space interval between interviews per participants was between three to seven days; this gave participants enough time to process what took place in the interview and not so much time that participants might forget about the interview (Seidman, 2013). Each digital recording was transcribed prior to the next interview. Transcribing the interview before the final interview allowed the researcher to ensure that the questions were answered adequately and to check with participants for clarity, when necessary.

Multicultural Course Syllabus Review

The researcher explored each instructor's course syllabus to see the detailed areas of diversity that they addressed in their classes, the emphasis they placed on various areas of diversity, and the structure of the class activities and assigned reading materials. The syllabi were helpful in assessing for consistency of and deeper understanding between the interviews and what was being taught in the classroom. The syllabi were reviewed before the first interviews so that the interviewer would be aware of the structure of these multicultural courses and seek clarification if necessary.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

Data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking were used in this study to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. For triangulation, several data collection methods were utilized. This included the three in-depth interviews, a demographic questionnaire, and the review of participants' course syllabi. The researcher also participated in a peer debriefing group comprised of doctoral students trained in qualitative research to help with limiting biases in data analysis. Member checking took place after the second and third interviews. Participants were invited to review the transcripts and thematic findings to ensure that their experiences were captured correctly.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The data analysis followed the principles of IPA to identify relevant themes (Emery & Anderman, 2020). Data analysis began with immersing in the data by reviewing all transcripts multiple times for accuracy. While reviewing interviews, the researcher extracted themes; clusters of these themes were created and used as a guide for the following two reviews of the transcripts. The researcher identified specific statements, coded these statements, and used them as supportive evidence for conceptual themes. Having completed this process, for credibility and trustworthiness the participants were invited to review the transcripts and authenticate the themes and findings. In addition, the peer debrief team reviewed the transcripts and identified codes and findings. Together, the research and peer debrief team examined the accuracy of the codes, themes, and findings, and ensured that the themes and analysis reflected participants' responses.

Findings

The main finding of this study was that cultural history impacts how instructors teach multicultural counseling courses. Two subthemes were also derived from the theme of cultural history. The first subtheme indicated that instructors tend to teach about aspects of diversity with which they are familiar and comfortable. The second subtheme showed that some MCCIs' lack of experience with a diversity topic drove significant areas of focus in the course; therefore, MCCIs' areas of deficit influence salient diversity topics. Table 1 depicts the theme and subthemes.

Table 1

Description of Emerging Theme and Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
Cultural History Impacts MCCIs' Teaching	Subtheme 1: Teaching from familiarity and comfortability drives salient topics
	Subtheme 2: Teaching from area of cultural deficit influences salient diversity topics

Theme: Cultural History

This major theme captured instructors' prior experiences with diversity before they started teaching the MCC course. A key finding common to all six instructors was that their prior experiences with diversity influenced their teaching of the MCC course. The level of exposure to cultural diversity described by instructors prior to them teaching the MCC course ranged on a continuum from almost non-existent to very exposed. For instance, two participants described their diversity experiences as "minimal," while four stated that they were exposed to a lot of cultural diversity growing up. Their cultural diversity history was perceived as having a bearing on how each person approached the teaching of the course. Participants identified the unique ways in which their background experiences with diversity shaped the topics that they selected to teach and how they delivered certain topics. One significant takeaway from this thematic finding was that the areas of diversity that were most salient to instructors were more frequently discussed in their courses. Instructors posited that their interest or curiosity to explore certain areas of diversity while teaching came from both their personal experiences with the cultural phenomenon prior to teaching or, in some cases, their lack of experience with a particular form of diversity, as shown in the

subthemes below.

Subtheme 1: Teaching from Familiarity and Comfortability Drives Salient Topics

Sarah's account demonstrated that she considered topics that she experienced and was familiar with to be salient and spent more time talking about these topics based on prior experiences to becoming a MCC course instructor. Sarah, who identified as White, stated that she had limited experiences with diversity. However, during her experience as a school counselor, she gained much more experience working with students from lower socioeconomic statuses. This area of diversity became an essential and detailed topic covered in her MCC course. She described this phenomenon as follows:

I grew up in a community, very homogeneous, in terms of race and ethnicity. I went to Catholic school, and everyone was White. So, my exposures to people that are different from me, didn't happen until I went into the world of work, where my biggest, richest experience happened. I grew up middle class and thought everybody was, and then I started working in a city school and was opened up to another world of economic disparities.

When Sarah was asked what area of diversity was salient for her, she stated the issue of poverty, and that she spent a lot of time during her MCC classes teaching about issues centered on childhood poverty and the impact it had on students' performance outcome and functioning. She further remarked, "so I'm really interested in that (referring to poverty in children), and how we can shift the conversation because I have seen a lot of childhood poverty." She also expressed awareness of and interest in the topic of race, which she acknowledged as a more difficult topic to address in the MCC class:

I also think that race is hard to talk about because people have a lot of stuff they bring to the table. Although race is related to poverty, sometimes poverty feels like an easier

conversation in an educational setting. So sometimes conversation centered on poverty can make people feel a little less defensive. I did focus mostly on poverty. I used three separate classes to address this on my syllabus and continuously made reference, and I think students achieved much from these classes. In the above statement, Sarah indicated that the conversation of race was difficult to have, but having been exposed to socio-economic and social class issues made the discussions on these topics more comfortable. Combing through Sarah's MCC course syllabi, there were three sections that addressed issues around cultural poverty and social class; this was the only topic that was given multiple class sections on the syllabus. Sarah gave more attention to multicultural issues that she had the most previous knowledge about, compared to issues either unfamiliar or uncomfortable to discuss. Her remark insinuated that race was a difficult conversation and, therefore, it was avoided; this does not mean that she felt that race was not necessary to explore. Rather, she chose not to make it her area of focus. In essence, Sarah made what was familiar and comfortable the essential focal topic.

Another participant, Sam, stated that rather than focusing on specific content areas related to diversity as a salient diversity topic, he wanted his students to leave with an overall philosophy related to being open and reflective about diversity and their own cultural development; this matched his own values. Sam's focus was on teaching students about cultural awareness, humility, and cultural sensitivity. Sam considered himself very diverse in terms of his exposure to various cultures and stated that he learned about cultural humility and cultural sensitivity through personal experiences. He described himself as a Christian who grew up living with Hindus and Muslims. He also lived in several countries where he was considered a minority and studied in several foreign countries. Therefore, he perceived that his personal experience taught him about multiculturalism

and how to exercise cultural humility and sensitivity. He described his MCC course focus as one that would provide students with the opportunity to change their attitudes and develop an appreciation towards other cultures. In his syllabus, teaching about self-awareness, counselor eliminating prejudice, biases and oppression were strongly identified.

Finally, Blake shared that an area of diversity that was significant for him was cultural identity development, which was personally salient for him. In his first interview, he gave a thorough description about his experience with diversity, and in the third interview he reflected on how his earlier experiences might have influenced his focus of having students explore who they were as cultural beings. Blake identified as African American and described his experience growing up as living in “two worlds.” He lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood comprised of mostly low to middle-income families and attended a Black Baptist Church.

However, his parents insisted that he attended Catholic schools to get a “good education.” The Catholic Schools he attended had mostly “White”, upper- and upper-middle-class students, teachers, and administrators. He described this experience as “doing a lot of code switching” and shared that his earlier years were focused on taking on an identity that matched his social surroundings in order to fit in. It was not until his latter part of college when he started to figure out who he really was. As he described below, he considered this experience to have fueled his interest in teaching students to thoroughly explore who they were as cultural beings:

There was a contrast somewhat with my educational experience. So, in terms of my K-12 education, I went to a predominantly White Catholic school. And then with my experience, racially at home, in my home community, was primarily with other Black Americans. I had a religious difference in experience and a racial difference in experience as well; there was absolutely socio-economic difference. So many of the people that the Catholic institutions

where I was attending were in a very different financial bracket then. There was a huge contrast between home life versus school life.

Blake was asked if there were any connections with his earlier experiences with diversity and the way he taught the MCC course. He shared that he tried to focus on having students become self-aware and explore cultural identity developmental models, and he could see the importance for this because he grew up not having a strong sense of his own identity, as he stated below.

I oftentimes find myself going through identity development models; I think there's value to doing it very often. I've very much attended to where students are developmentally and their own ability to identify themselves as cultural beings. So sometimes I am very open to shifting away from some of the specific content. I shift

more towards them engaging in significant exploration around how they see themselves as cultural beings, for me, if they're not able to locate themselves as a person who has a gender, a professional identity, a racial identity, or national identity, then they are going to struggle with truly gaining and grasping the concept of multiculturalism, and identity development.

Blake focused a lot on his developmental years, especially as they relate to how he navigated both worlds in which he existed, and he conveyed a strong sense of passion and connectedness to this topic. Even in his description of how he taught the class, he shared that he had students journal a lot about themselves and their own cultural developmental process.

Each of these participants focused their teaching topics based on their own personal experiences. They also shared about the confidence they had in teaching on issues familiar to them.

Subtheme 2: Teaching from Area of Deficit Influenced Salient Diversity Topics

While some of the MCCIs made the area of diversity with which they were most familiar and comfortable teaching most relevant to their class, others made diversity issues they were least familiar or uncomfortable with their main focus in the curriculum. Four participants, Trevor, Andrea, Blake, and David shared those issues around LGBTQI (lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) cultural identity were also salient for them in their classes. None of them were exposed to LGBTQI issues prior to teaching the MCC course, and they reported feeling it was important for them to get more knowledge and experience regarding this population. Trevor, Andrea, Blake and David shared that their Christian backgrounds taught them that LGBTQI individuals and practices were deviant and unacceptable. They also agreed that being placed in a position where they had to teach about sexual orientation and gender identity helped them change their attitudes and perceptions regarding LGBTQI individuals.

David, who identified as an immigrant from the Western region of Africa, shared that he had never had an encounter with anyone from the LGBTQI group in his country of origin. He stated that this was a “taboo” for him. He had to teach about it; therefore, he became very open to this topic, by necessity. Below, David shared his experience regarding his lack of experience with the LGBTQI individuals:

I have not worked with individuals in the LGBTQI community. That's an area for me, coming here to the U.S and from my own culture, that I had the least experience with. I had not worked with them, maybe consciously or unconsciously. But that is an area that I had to do the most growth in order to teach about this group.

These participants concluded that they learned much more during their role as a MCC instructor about sexual diversity and made a conscious decision to continue learning more about

LGBTQI individuals so that their students could be properly informed. David further shared that he realized as the instructor of the MCC course, staying away from a certain diversity topic because it made him uncomfortable would not be beneficial for the students.

When it comes to diversity, everything is on the table. If I as an instructor can stay away from something because I'm uncomfortable, how are the students then going to be able to approach those issues when they become professional counselors and are carrying out their counseling work? I have become more sensitive about sexuality issues. Regardless of the challenge I had in this area, I sought knowledge through the literature and listened to practicing professionals share their clinical experiences to develop myself to teach the students.

Blake, in his reflection about areas of deficit and teaching, shared that his direct exposure to various groups of students (especially those with different sexual identities) in his graduate class provided him with a different insight. As the students openly talked about their sexual orientation, he began to examine his own biases and preconceived notions that were heavily influenced by religion and lack of direct exposure prior to teaching:

There have been some classes where I've had some folks from diverse or special backgrounds in terms of LGBTQ. I've had trans students; individuals who have identified as pansexual or just queer. In order to relate to these students, I had to know who they were. I have also gotten severe pushback from these students on how certain text presents information on gender and sexual orientation issues. This caused me to gain a wide amount of knowledge so that I can alter the course readings and activities.

In addition, Trevor shared about identifying as a privileged White male and teaching about racism and racial inequity in the MCC course. He admitted that it was a very difficult and often

uncomfortable task at times, but this was one of his salient topics. Trevor, being raised in a very homogenous family and community, shared that he had very limited exposure to diversity until he went to college, and even then, his friendship circles in college were not diverse.

Therefore, he felt he still lacked knowledge and experiences regarding certain cultural groups. He was motivated to teach the course because he was challenged by a minority faculty member that he was not eligible to teach the course because he was from a privileged background and would not be able to relate to the content. However, despite the lack of experience and the opinions of others, he volunteered to teach the MCC course. Trevor explained that it was very fitting for students, especially those who are also from a privileged class, to hear from a White male that racism and racial inequity existed in America.

To prepare for the topic of racism and racial structures, he read widely about racism, and he used films and invited guest speakers who were experts on the subject, but he never shied away from the topic. Here he expressed how he felt about teaching the course and about racism:

Sometimes I'm proud of myself for teaching this course because I know the way that I grew up should hold me back. The way I teach, and the feedback that I get, sometimes I feel like I have a bit of imposter syndrome. Like, I'm not sure if I'm really equipped to do this. There is conflict because I know I have no personal experience with a lot of the cultural stuff, especially race related issues. I was even told by a professor that I am not capable of teaching the MCC course, however I can and do talk about privilege, and the fact that I can address this in a different way. I can speak to it where people cannot say I am teaching on racism and inequity from a place of anger or resentment. But it's more of a place of personal awareness. But a lot of students appreciate the class and have changed their perspective on racism, which is what matters to me.

In essence, the data revealed that all participants used their former experiences to determine what they taught in their MCC courses and that their strategies varied. Some participants felt that it was better to take their areas of strength or greatest experiences as their main focus of teaching. Others felt that it would be more beneficial to start where they were most deficient, which allowed them to learn along with their students. It also helped them to develop a greater sense of appreciation for groups of persons that they, prior to teaching this course, would not have felt compelled to embrace.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate how MCC course instructors perceived the influence of their cultural backgrounds on their teaching of the diversity course. This study revealed that cultural history influences teaching. All six participants' earlier life experiences affected how they taught the course. This result supports the theoretical underpinnings of social construction theory that our identities are also shaped by the culture and environment to which we are exposed (Dombrowski, 2020). These data suggests that participants' life experiences and racial/ethnic identities influenced their values and shaped their views on what was significant to teach in the MCC diversity course. They were influenced to include issues in their courses, either because of how they added value to their lived experiences, or because they felt that they needed to learn more about it (because of its salience and relevance) and that it had the potential to add value to their lives as well as the lives of their students.

The instructors who included the areas they struggled with the most in their teaching consciously made efforts to eliminate these biases by exploring them in the curriculum. The inclusion of unfamiliar or difficult topics in the course curriculum eliminated pre-existing cultural biases that once shaped their world views (Nottoli & Giuffrida, 2017). This set of MCCIs also

demonstrated cultural relativism, which is considered significant to multicultural counseling competence (Nottoli & Giuffrida, 2017). In exploring these unfamiliar diversity practices, they were able to understand other cultural practices of unfamiliar groups. Their counseling students in training were also not left to the detriment of limited exposure to certain diversity topics because of their instructor's inadequacy to teach a particular diversity topic. Similarly, John (2017) explored counselor educators spiritual and religious competence and found that two of the nine participants had transformative experiences. They had biases towards LGBTQI individuals due to their religious background, but through ongoing classroom interactions with students, they became very accepting and informed. These counselor educators in this study also reported professional and personal cultural competence growth.

Most of the participants who chose to teach from an area of deficit were from marginalized or minority cultural groups. They were also exposed to a lot of cultural diversity and were aware of their identity in various diversity settings or groups. While some research concludes that race or minority status does not influence multicultural competence, having racial and ethnic self-awareness does (Winston, 2016). Individuals with more association with racial and ethnic minority communities have reported higher ethnic identity awareness, and consequently demonstrated greater levels of multicultural competence (Matthews et al., 2018). The MCCIs who did not include certain topics because they felt it was uncomfortable shared about their lack of exposure to diversity growing up. The MCCIs with minimum exposure to diversity who taught from a place of deficit said he was challenged to teach the course and certain topics because he was told that he could not do it, and he wanted to prove them wrong.

Either way, the instructors negotiated salient diversity issues in different ways based on their prior experiences. In essence, when instructors assessed their role in teaching the MCC

course, their worldviews shaped by earlier life experiences were either influential in decisions concerning dominant diversity topics, or they restructured their worldviews in ways that precluded negative past experiences in their own lives. It can be concluded, therefore, that the MCCIs reflected on their previous experiences as they sought to create their course.

The response of the MCCIs who taught topics from comfortability and familiarity is consistent with conclusions from prior research. Previous findings have demonstrated that university instructors, when teaching about diversity will only feel comfortable effectively leading conversations involving emotionally charged topics such as race, privilege, and power, if they have previously engaged in these dialogues themselves (Brion, 2021; Burton & Furr, 2014). One MCCI shared that she avoided the topic of race because she lacked the experience in this subject. Due to the emotional nature of these topics, Smith et al. (2017) and Young (2003) both concluded that many university instructors view open dialogues related to race and ethnicity as potentially violating academic protocol. Other research has concluded that some instructors feared the consequences of receiving negative reactions due to poor course evaluations (Sue, 2016). Another observation from the current study that is highlighted by prior research is that some instructors also feel threatened by counselor trainees who know more about certain topics, leading them to shy away from difficult components of the curriculum. They reported that when they are anxious, they will say or do the wrong thing due to the lack of knowledge regarding certain areas of diversity (Reynolds, 2011).

Additionally, this major finding supports prior literature that has explored the changing of worldviews while teaching diversity courses. Aikenhead and Jegede (1999) describe this cultural awareness process that individuals go through as they explore their existing beliefs and adjust to their new roles or expectations as diversity teachers. They postulate that individuals assimilating

into a new culture as they teach may undergo collateral learning, whereby they experience cognitive conflict with their existing beliefs. The majority of the MCCIs demonstrated cognitive conflict with their previous beliefs and new role as a diversity instructor, which finally was resolved as they gained more years of experience in teaching the course. They originally held the assumption that a particular culture or behavior was negative, but having encountered or learned more about that experience, they transformed their worldviews. For example, some of the participants became more accepting of LGBTQI culture as a result of their new role as MCCIs. The experience gained while teaching prompted them to revisit their previous experiences and adjusted to accommodate this new knowledge. Consequently, this became the salient area of focus in their class.

Implications for Future Practice and Research

Findings from the current study have implications for future research in multicultural education and training. The majority of multicultural counseling competence training literature focuses on the cultural competence development for students, but not on the instructor who teaches diversity-related courses. According to MCC theorists and researchers, awareness, and knowledge about oneself in relation to others is critical for instructors who teach diversity courses (Sue, 2016). Although this study sheds some light on how instructors' cultural backgrounds influenced their identities and allowed them to explore this awareness, future research with a larger and more diverse sample is needed to explore instructors' awareness of their cultural identities and intersectionality's, and how they influence their teaching roles. Both qualitative and quantitative methodology would be useful in addressing MCCIs cultural awareness and how they teach diversity.

The instructors in this study saw the importance of critically assessing their own cultural

experiences. Future research should move toward developing models for understanding how instructors' cycle through their own cultural competence development. A complex model could incorporate how instructors developed prior to becoming counselor educators and how their social and cultural identities influence their teaching and student learning. MCCIs, having this understanding, could potentially engage in more cultural self-assessments and develop more awareness of how cultural biases and socialization could influence the course curriculum and how they perceive and relate to their students.

Limitations

A limitation to this study was a lack of classroom observation as a data collection source. Classroom observations would have been useful to explore the extent to which the course syllabi were actually implemented within the classroom. The researcher addressed this limitation by allowing the MCCIs to talk about the syllabus construction and teaching experiences during the second interview. Future research should be developed to include live observation of how the MCCIs interact with the diversity content as described in their syllabus and how they relate to the students based on their cultural identity, as discussed in their interviews.

Another limitation is that while the study had a few diverse sample representatives, having a larger and wider representation of persons with varying cultural identities and professional experiences could have provided a more comprehensive point of view regarding this phenomenon. Lastly, the exclusion of counselor educators who used prearranged syllabus developed by other MCCIs or experts in the field is also a sampling limitation. Their perspectives on teaching diversity topics with limited ability to modify the syllabus could be explored by future research. In sum, more research that is representative of a wider variety of groups of instructors is needed to understand the potential influence of cultural background and teaching, and to propose models or

strategies for addressing relational challenges of instructor and diversity course content.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, multicultural counseling competence training has garnered a lot of attention in the counseling profession. Much teaching and research has been centered on training students to develop cultural awareness, knowledge and skills based on culturally competent perspectives. While this is of significance, there's also a need to understand who is involved in the training and the development of their cultural experiences. This study contributed to the importance of understanding the cultural experiences of the MCCIs who are developing and teaching the MCC training courses. Findings from the current study shows MCCIs' previous experiences with diversity and cultural identity influenced their roles as the MCCIs.

The social construction theory helped illuminate the understanding of the cultural experiences of the MCCIs and the influence on teaching, in that MCCIs' creation of knowledge and ideas of what they consider salient was influenced by their social processes or interactions. Some participants shared how their history and culture shaped the teaching of the course. Others shared that their identity and experience as a MCCI exposed them to knowledge on certain culture diversity topics and groups, which shows that some MCCIs may go through different cultural learning or development phases. Social constructionism states that "knowledge is not something people possess somewhere in their heads, but rather, something people do through the interactions with others and the environment" (Gergen, 1985, p. 270). These findings call for imperativeness for MCCIs to examine their background experiences with diversity, which will help to identify their biases, strengths, and weaknesses in order to ensure that a very rich MCC curriculum is delivered to students.

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