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## Critically Examining Black Students' Preparation to Counsel White Clients

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# Critically Examining Black Students' Preparation to Counsel White Clients

## **Abstract** **Abstract**

This study explored how Black students are prepared to counsel White clients in two predominantly White universities. Data analysis revealed five themes, which exposed Black students' preparation experiences: (a) relevant content excluded, (b) stereotyping experienced, (c) authenticity challenged, (d) counter spaces should be included, and (e) cultural sensitivity of faculty warrants increase. The authors discuss implications of the study's findings for educators as well as limitations and recommendations for future research.

## **Author's Notes**

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## **Keywords**

African American, Counselor Preparation, White Clients, Counselor Education

Given the scope and nature of their work, counselor educators are duty-bound to practice in culturally sensitive and culturally appropriate ways, as acknowledged in various professional, and legal guidelines and ACA ethical mandates (ACA, 2014; Ratts, Singh, McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). While in many ways this is still an aspirational goal for the profession, training programs have been intentional and systematic in the preparation of future counselor educators to be culturally competent and provide effective services to diverse, marginalized, and underserved populations (CACREP, 2009, 2016). In the 1980s, the counseling profession began to recognize the importance of race and ethnicity and the need to address diversity and difference in the effectiveness of counseling services for diverse clients. Also during this time, scholars were conceptualizing and developing models for multicultural counseling competence (e.g., Sue, Bernier, Durran, Feinberg, Pedersen, & Smith, et al., 1982).

Sue et al. (1982) conceptualized multicultural counseling competency in terms of three components: (1) counselors' multicultural knowledge, (2) beliefs and attitudes (self-awareness), and (3) skills. Since the initial conceptualization, this model has been expanded (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) and operationalized (Arredondo, Toporek, Brown, Jones, Locke, Sanchez, & Stadler, 1996). Arredondo and colleagues provided greater specificity to what was termed "multicultural competency" (p. 477) by defining 31 multicultural counseling competencies.

The multicultural competencies include three distinct characteristics and three dimensions. Specifically, becoming a culturally competent counselor requires active involvement in developing the following characteristics: examining one's own cultural biases and assumptions (Chu-Lien Chao, 2012); developing knowledge of the client's worldview (CACREP, 2016; Ratts et al., 2015); and learning culturally appropriate interventions (CACREP, 2016; Ratts et al., 2015). Each characteristic has three dimensions: (1) beliefs and attitudes, (2) knowledge, and (3) skills.

By combining the three characteristics with each of the three dimensions, the authors created nine areas of competence. The Association of Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD) subsequently adopted these competencies (Arredondo et al., 1996). In 2015 these standards were updated to incorporate terminology more inclusive and demonstrative of the individuals in the counseling profession (e.g., privileged counselor; marginalized counselor; Ratts et al., 2015).

The American Counseling Association incorporated cultural and diversity standards into its Code of Ethics (ACA, 2000); and currently, multicultural standards have been incorporated into all eight sections of the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005, 2014). These multicultural standards have influenced accreditation of programs, program curricula, and instruction in doctoral-level and master's-level counseling programs (CACREP, 2009, 2016). In addition, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has included multicultural standards in the training standards for doctoral- and master's-level counseling programs (CACREP, 2001, 2009, 2016).

### **Diversity in Counseling Curriculum**

CACREP integrates multicultural considerations into the Social and Cultural Diversity core curriculum standards. Training focusing on a variety of modalities to help students better understand their own cultural persona; their role in being social justice advocates; understanding oppression, bias, prejudice, and discrimination; understanding behaviors and practices that interfere with positive human growth and development; and understanding the characteristics and challenges for domestic and internationally diverse groups has been recommended (CACREP, 2009). As training programs attempt to adhere to these standards, changes in curricula have taken place (Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011). Specifically, multicultural learning has been structured and incorporated into programs through four pedagogical strategies: (1) separate

courses, (2) area of concentration models, (3) interdisciplinary approaches, and (4) integration models (Seward, 2009). There are bodies of literature that address challenges and issues associated with some of these strategies (e.g., separate courses); however, much of this literature is beyond the scope of this discussion. It has been acknowledged that one of the most effective ways for counselors to become culturally competent and put knowledge into practice is to employ a combination of the four strategies in master's counseling programs (Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994).

Many programs continue to use the separate course pedagogical strategy to address multicultural standards set forth by professional organizations and accrediting agencies (Priester et al., 2008). Scholars have found that in separate multicultural courses, faculty present select client populations (Priester et al., 2008; Seward, 2009). However, White client populations were consistently absent from the list of cultural groups studied. In addition, a review of the literature on multicultural training using a separate course format reveals that Black counselor/White client dyads are absent during training (Haizlip, 2012; Priester et al., 2008). Previously, scholars viewed Black students as more culturally savvy and embodying more multicultural competence in their counseling interactions with clients (Holcomb-McCoy, & Myers, 1999; Negy, 1999). Thus, supervisors and counselor educators may assume that discussions regarding the Black counselor/White client dynamic do not need to be addressed (Seward, 2009) and that Black students do not need cultural training (Ivers, 2012; Negy, 1999).

### **Black Counselors' Interactions with White Clients**

However, researchers indicate there may be a need for Black students to receive cultural training (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010; Hernández, Almeida, & Carranza, 2010; Ivers, 2012). In a

recent study, scholars have found that there was no significant difference between White students and Black students in terms of multicultural counseling competence (Ivers, 2012). In addition, scholars have noted that counselors of color often experience microaggressions and racism while counseling White clients (Hernández et al.; Marbley, 2004) and experience other difficulties, such as racism, stereotyping, and discrimination (Davis & Gelsomino, 1994). It is important for Black student counselors to understand that even though they are in a counselor role there can still be power and privilege dynamics operating that can create additional challenges. Literature examining the Black counseling students' experiences merely speaks to the students' experiences regarding preparation and interaction with diverse clients and White instructors or White supervisors. Scholars have yet to hear the authentic voices of Black students as they contend with their preparation to counsel White clients. As such, this study sought to fill a gap in the literature by examining Black students' preparation to counsel White clients. The researchers sought to explore this phenomenon by answering the following research questions: How have counseling programs prepared Black students to work with White clients?, What challenges have Black students experienced in working with White clients?, and How can counselor education programs better prepare Black students to counsel White clients?

### **Method**

This study utilized qualitative inquiry, as it focuses on context and participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). The researchers selected a multiple case study design, which allowed them to explore a single phenomenon at two institutions. The case study was appropriate for this study, as it allowed the researchers to examine the direct experiences of African American students in counselor education programs (Patton, 2002). The case study research strategy led to new meanings about the relationship between Black students, educational preparation, and

counseling services for White clients (Stake, 2006). Using a case study strategy afforded the researchers an opportunity to develop a comprehensive understanding of Black students at two selected academic institutions, and it enabled a dialogue to develop in regards to the theoretical framework of Whiteness. In addition, the case study provided an avenue to intensely study the master and counter narratives of Black students' preparation to counsel White clients at two institutions (Stake, 2006).

Inclusion criteria required programs to (1) be predominantly White, (2) be accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs (CACREP), (3) have at least two Black students enrolled in practicum or internship, (4) have at least two full-time faculty that teach these Black students, and (5) have taken at least one multicultural counseling course. After an extensive literature review, Internet exploration, discussions with experts in the field, Human Subjects IRB approval, and preliminary correspondence with potential programs, the first author determined that four programs met the criteria for case selection. In addition, the researchers adhered to the ACA code of ethics throughout the research process. The researchers selected two programs for this study because of the access to potential participants, program structure, and curricula. The program spokespersons agreed to participate in the study under the pretext of anonymity. As a result, researchers used the following pseudonyms: Eastern State University (ESU) and University of Southern State (USS). Furthermore, to ensure the anonymity of the participants and institution, the researchers used pseudonyms regarding places and programs affiliated with ESU and USS.

### **Settings**

At ESU approximately 71 students are enrolled in counseling graduate programs. The student racial demographics include White ( $N = 51$ ), Black ( $N = 11$ ), Asian ( $N = 3$ ), Hispanic ( $N$

= 3), and Multi-racial ( $N = 3$ ). In this study, student participants were seeking a master's degree in areas related to mental health counseling. At USS approximately 74 students are enrolled in counseling graduate programs, with the following racial demographics: White ( $N = 62$ ), Black ( $N = 9$ ), Hispanic ( $N = 2$ ), and Asian ( $N = 1$ ). Student participants for this study were in master's degrees in school counseling and college counseling.

### **Participants**

To identify faculty and student participants at two predominantly White universities the researchers used purposive sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012). The student participant criteria included the following: (1) identify as Black or African American, (2) currently enrolled in Practicum or Internship at a CACREP accredited Predominantly White Institution (PWI), and (3) completed at least nine credit hours. The student sample consisted of six female students, with a mean age of 24 years old ( $SD = 2$  years). Three students were in the school counseling program at USS and three students were in the mental health counseling program at ESU. All students were currently in a practicum or internship experience and had taken at least one multicultural course related to counseling. All student participants identified as women.

The criteria for faculty participation included the following: (1) faculty member at a CACREP predominantly White university, (2) tenure track or full-time clinical faculty, and (3) teaching Black counseling master's students. The faculty sample consisted of two White female faculty members from ESS and two White male faculty members from USS, ranging from 49-64 years of age. All instructors had served as university supervisors for the student participants' practicum and internship courses.

### **Researchers**



The primary research team consisted of one Black woman (first author), one White woman, and one White man. The first author conducted all interviews with the participants for consistency. The researchers bracketed their positions prior to data collection to reduce bias and enhance rigor of the study. Bracketing is a process, which allows researchers to discuss prior experiences, preconceptions, and previous knowledge relevant to the research topic before collecting and analyzing the data to decrease its interference with or influence on the participants' experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). The primary researcher team discussed experiences and personal views related to the Black student/White client dyad. Specifically, the researchers examined the clinical, teaching, and supervision experiences involving Black students and White clients.

### **Data Collection**

**Interview Protocols.** The researchers operationalized the three research questions into interview questions. The researchers designed the interview questions to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry were pursued with each person interviewed (Creswell, 2012). The researchers used the CACREP standards to determine the core components of training students need to become culturally competent: course curriculum, practicum and internship experiences, and supervision during the initial interview. The core of the interview focused on how these three components addressed Black students' preparation to counsel White clients.

After reviewing current literature, the researchers deduced that Black students have substantially more challenges than their White counter-parts. Consequently, the researchers include questions regarding Black students' challenges as they related to the training components. The researchers developed several introductory demographic questions to solidify the students' and faculty's suitability for the study, as well as to begin the rapport building process and relax the student and the faculty before delving into the main interview questions. A scholar in the field of

counselor education with qualitative research expertise edited the protocols for appropriateness, and the researchers incorporated the feedback into the final protocols. The primary researcher asked the student participants eight open-ended questions (see Appendix A), and asked the faculty participants ten questions (see Appendix B).

The students and faculty participated in two face to face and or phone interviews spanning one semester. The first interview lasted 60 to 75 minutes and focused on interview protocol questions. The primary researcher conducted a second interview three months after the initial interviews and lasted 45-60 minutes. The second interview allowed the researcher to revisit all of the questions from the first interview, probe for more details, and gather data regarding differences in responses due to current experiences. The second interview allowed the researchers to share any information they deem relevant to the topic, which was not included in the first interview.

**Syllabi.** The primary researcher also collected artifacts in the form of course syllabi. The syllabi included the following courses: techniques of counseling, multicultural counseling, human development, practicum, ethics of counseling, and group counseling. The researchers used this artifact data for the purpose of triangulation, to ensure credibility of findings (Creswell, 2012; Hays & Singh, 2012). Consequently, the course syllabi were valuable in understanding the structure of courses, as well as verifying the course content. The researchers examined the course objectives, accreditation standards, class topics, and course assignments from the syllabi, and coded this content using the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

The primary researcher recorded every interview and had each of the interviews transcribed into a text format. The primary researcher sent each participant copies of the transcripts to verify the accuracy of the information. Two participants did add additional information, which was

included in the data analysis process. The researchers identified *a priori* codes based on current literature prior to data analysis. The first author discussed and analyzed the codes with a peer reviewer to ensure accuracy. The peer reviewer was an expert in the area of qualitative methodology with over 15 years of expertise in qualitative research and writing. The researchers made changes to the codes in response to the reviewer's comments and then selected participant statements that signified the identified *a priori* code to assist with accurately coding all transcripts.

The two researchers (one of whom was the first author) tasked with coding the data received training in the constant comparative method and together they had over 20 years of experience in conducting qualitative research. By using this method, the researchers constantly compared coded data to each new piece of data to establish codes (Creswell, 2012). An initial comparison allowed the researchers to identify distinct data that aligned with the *a priori* codes and helped the researchers to identify additional axial codes. Using the *a priori* codes and axial codes, the researchers read and reread text, going back and forth between the text and code, coding, rereading, and recoding; this process is indicative of the qualitative research process and allowed the researchers to derive five themes related to the experiences of Black counseling master's students at a PWI.

**Trustworthiness.** In response to these assumptions and biases, the researchers took several steps to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Hays & Singh, 2012). First, researchers piloted interview questions with two individuals knowledgeable about qualitative research and multicultural competence. The researchers also used bracketing, triangulation, a peer debriefer, and member checking.

Prior to collecting data, the researchers' positions were also presented and examined through bracketing (Hays & Singh, 2012). As such, the researchers shared personal values and

interactions concerning marginalization, cross-cultural education, and privilege. For example, they discussed their experiences with oppression, as well as the impact of this oppression on their interactions with students. The researchers also examined predispositions and biases regarding students' of color preparation to counsel White clients in counselor education programs and the impact these connections would have on the collected data. Specifically, the researchers discussed how previous interactions with counseling students exposed them to the lack of attention to cross-cultural dynamics. Subsequently, the researchers expected that faculty members did not address the Black student/White client dyad. The researchers acknowledged a bias in favor of addressing this dyad in not only multicultural courses, but throughout the curriculum. With these in mind, the researchers included several additional steps to increase the study's credibility.

The researchers used methods triangulation and triangulation of sources to compare interview and artifact data for the purposes of triangulating findings (Patton, 2002). This allowed the researchers to gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the preparation of Black students at two predominantly White CACREP institutions to counsel White clients. In addition, it allowed the researchers to understand what specific aspects of the courses address the phenomenon in question. The researcher used a peer debriefer to enhance the accuracy of the study by posing questions about the coding process, the findings, and the authenticity of the study to ensure that the interviews reflected the participants' voices and not the researchers'. In qualitative research, scholars recommend the peer debriefer review at least 20-25% of collected data, in this study the peer reviewer reviewed approximately 30% of the interviews in form of three faculty interviews and five student interviews (Creswell, 2012).

The researchers also used member checking to validate the data. Member checking took place on three levels based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines for member checking. The

first level occurred during the interviews. The primary researcher restated and summarized information shared by participants throughout the interview, thereby allowing the participants to correct any information that the interviewer misunderstood or add additional information for clarity. The second type of member checking occurred in the week following the initial and follow up interviews. The participants received a detailed written summary of the interviews and had the opportunity to correct any information that was inaccurate. The primary research sent a revised summary and transcript to the participants for a final review. The final level of member checking happened at the culmination of the study, where the participants reviewed the findings and provided feedback.

### **Findings**

The researchers uncovered five themes: (1) relevant content excluded, (2) stereotyping experienced, (3) authenticity challenged, (4) counter spaces should be included, and (5) cultural sensitivity of faculty warrants increase. The first two themes illuminate microaggressions experienced by Black students. The third theme explains the challenges the Black students experienced in feeling the need to conform and alter their typical and genuine behavior to try to succeed and contend with the difficulties they experienced with White clients. The final two themes suggest strategies counselor training programs can use to cultivate an educational environment conducive to engaging in dialogues and facilitating experiences that address the challenges experienced by Black students; whereby, more competently preparing Black students to counsel White clients.

### **Relevant Content Excluded**

Students and faculty from both universities noted that curriculum failed to include content specifically related to Black students' preparation to counsel White clients. Faculty and students

provided several examples illustrating this point. A faculty member from USS stated, “I don’t address [Black students working with White clients] ...A lot of times, I think the audience that I have in mind are more middle-class White students...So it’s very possible that I have been inadvertently short-changing our minority students.” Another faculty member from ESU, expanded this notion, “I’m much more oriented toward looking at issues for White counselors working with minority clients; it’s another subtle form of discrimination that we are not sensitive to the minority issues.”

Students from both universities admitted that the coursework was designed by White theorists for White clients, which they found theoretically helpful in their work with White clients. However, the students also indicated that content addressing cross cultural dynamics and challenges with White clients was inequitable. For example, one student discussed how Black concerns with White clients were not addressed, “There is a focus on helping the White counselors learn how to deal with people who are different than they are, but when it comes to the Black counselors, it’s not really talked about at all.” Another student shared that faculty seemed to ignore the Black counselor/White client dynamic by taking the stance that the courses reasonably address White clients, stating, “theories are basically geared toward White clients, and that’s all you need to know about White clients.” One of the faculty participants also discussed his failure to address the minority counselor/White client dyad in his syllabus development,

Each time you lay out the syllabus, you’re required to make some really tough decisions about where, over a 15 week course, where are we going to put in our emphasis? ... I often times really will put much more emphasis on minority cultures than I do on the majority culture.

In support of this notion, syllabi in both programs showed that the Black counselor/White client dynamic was not included. While course objectives in four of the course syllabi examined referenced diversity or multicultural interactions or competence, none of the syllabus specified course content that would address the topic. Furthermore, the course syllabi course assignments failed to specifically expect students to address the dynamics and interactions of White clients with Black counselors.

Students not only explained the lack of attention of this dyad in curriculum content, but they also discussed the lack of attention in supervision and internship experiences. One student at ESU discussed this lack and how it affected her supervision experience,

I put a lot of time and effort into structuring the session and no matter what I go in with the client would suggest that I do something else... I wonder if I wasn't black, maybe she would treat me differently... But I can't bring this up in supervision and my supervisor doesn't bring it up when viewing my tapes sessions so I just to deal with it myself but I don't feel comfortable.

A student from USS relayed how her supervision experience also failed to address the White client dynamic, stating, "I haven't really gotten any feedback on counseling White students even when I do feel like I am having difficulty with developing rapport or feel uncomfortable my supervisor doesn't approach that topic." Several other students explained that supervision and practical experiences did not address the dynamics with their White clients, noting, that the topic was "glossed over", "ignored", and "assumed to be a non-issue." Faculty responses were consistent with the responses of the students. The faculty participants indicated that they "took a general approach", "focused on the basic counseling skills", and "did not aggregate based on race" when providing supervision to Black students,

## **Stereotyping Experienced**

All student participants indicated encountering racial stereotyping in interactions with White individuals and clients during their programs. One student from ESU explained explicitly how she was stereotyped by a White client: “They assume that because you’re Black you know about gangs... It just makes me feel like people are going to assume that I know everything about being Black or that being Black automatically means I know about rap music or gangs or other things like that.” Another student described how she experienced stereotyping by a White client during her practicum, stating, “One of the group members looked at me and seemed to think I was a member of the counseling group and had a drug problem...I could only wonder what role me being Black played in her assumption.” A student from ESU also indicated that she experienced similar interactions with White clients, stating, “a White client who I was counseling assumed that I would know a popular rap song simply because I was Black...he made the comment ‘you know what I’m talking about right, you listening to that type of music.’”

Three out of four faculty participants, all of whom were White, admittedly stereotyped Black students as not needing instruction on how to work with the White clients. One faculty member noted, “One of my assumptions that may be erroneous is that minority students have grown up in a minority culture world, and know a lot about the majority culture. So I often really will put much more emphasis on minority cultures.” While none of the faculty admitted to addressing the dynamic, three out of the four faculty members in the study acknowledged that Black students would probably deal with racism and discrimination from White clients.

## **Authenticity Challenged**

All six student participants indicated that they experienced difficulties in being authentic with White clients. In accordance, the students remained silent, *code switched* (i.e. changing how



they communicated when interacting with White clients), or tried to become a *model minority* (i.e., a person of color who emphasizes high achievement and education to be successful [Kaba, 2008]). Student participants indicated that they were silent because they “couldn’t discuss the issues,” “didn’t want to be seen as playing the race card”, and “didn’t know how to bring up the issues.” One student from ESU explained how she felt “silenced” and “uncomfortable discussing difficulties with a White client because it didn’t seem to be an issue that anyone else had or brought up.” A student at USS shared similar sentiments, asserting, “I’m the only minority. They are all White students and that makes it kind of hard to open up and talk about difficulties with White clients...I don’t want them to think I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Not only did student participants felt silenced and could not authentically address the concerns they had regarding White clients, they also code switched, whereby they changed their speech patterns and communication style in an attempt to experience acceptance and respect by White clients. Specifically, the students in the study expressed that they code switched to “represent their race properly”, “sound intelligent”, “really do counseling”, “talk a certain way”, and “sound like a counselor.” One student from ESU demonstrated this concept stating, “With White clients I talk much more professional, because I need to prove through how I talk that I am competent.”

In addition to code switching, four of the six student participants explained that they aspired to be a “model minority.” They endeavored to prove that they were “just as good as others or better”, while simultaneously ignoring the difficulties they had with White clients for fear of being labeled as “incompetent”, “inadequate”, or “inferior.” A student from ESU elaborated on this notion, stating, “I kind of feel like I’m constantly having to make sure I’m just as good as the White counselors.” Students from USS expressed similar sentiments. One stated: “You’re always

striving to do more. It's like you have to go above what everyone else does in order to be considered on the same level." Another explained, "Even when I'm not sure of something with a White client, I have to appear like I am sure."

### **Counter Spaces Should be Included**

Counter spaces are interactions with individuals that allow Black students to enhance their learning while simultaneously validating in their experiences (Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). All student participants stated they used counter spaces for support in dealing with issues related to counseling White clients. One student from USS shared how beneficial these interactions were: "I talk to other African Americans in the program if there are concerns related to working with Whites." A student from ESU expressed similar sentiments related to talking to other minorities in her program about difficulties in counseling White clients. While several of the students' interactions within counter spaces were helpful, they also revealed frustration regarding having to facilitate the development and use of counter spaces, in that they had to rely exclusively on individuals they sought out to negotiate experiences with White clients.

The faculty members appeared to understand the need for integrating opportunities for students to interact in counter spaces. One faculty member explicitly noted that they have referred students to faculty and staff of color for "supervision and support." In addition, several faculty members indicated that Black students may need to talk to individuals who "understand their perspective" or who "they feel more comfortable with." The faculty participants also discussed how counter spaces could provide them opportunities for "mentorship and role modeling."

### **Cultural Sensitivity of Faculty Warrants Increase**

To embolden faculty to not only rely on counter spaces, student and faculty participants indicated that increasing faculty members' cultural sensitivity would be the next logical step, which in turn would potentially facilitate changes in course content and supervision interactions.

Faculty members at USS and ESU supported this finding. One faculty member stated, "The faculty members need to be sensitive to the [Black counselor/White client] issue, so the faculty member can bring up the issues." Participants explored several strategies related to helping faculty members become more sensitive to the student of color/white client dyad. Pointedly, faculty participants noted that "hosting brown bag sessions" with faculty, adding "multicultural competencies and accrediting standards that explicitly address this issue", "attending professional development opportunities" that will challenge "cross cultural perspectives", and examining the "function of privilege and biases" on course content could increase faculty member cultural sensitivity. A faculty member at USS also discussed the importance of intentionally in regards to broaching this dyad; she explained that, "Structuring assignments that address the dynamic might be the best way to address the dynamic. Sometimes, when you structure something, it takes some of the discomfort away...of the faculty member and student."

Related to course preparation, student participants explained how culturally sensitive faculty members need to "intentionally broach the White client dyad" in all courses. A student at USS explained, "In courses where cross cultural conversation are included, faculty need to the take advantage of these opportunities and address the dynamic...by including case studies and role plays that include the challenges Black counselors experience with White clients."

In addition, students also explored how culturally sensitive faculty could address the dyad in supervision interactions. A student from USS discussed the importance of considering racial differences in supervision, asserting, "Faculty could help determine whether or not it's appropriate

to discuss racial differences and how to go about bringing it up.” Consequently, culturally sensitive faculty that specifically “integrate assignments that address the client dyad”, “examine their own biases”, and “intentionally broach this dyad” can help prepare Black students to identify and address concerns they may experience with White clients.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to: (1) explore Black students’ counseling preparation in regards to counseling White clients, and (2) to examine the role their counseling programs contributed to their preparedness at two universities. To date, this remains an understudied topic. Therefore, this study provided insight regarding what preparation students have experienced in their counseling programs. In addition, this study offers insight into what challenges Black students experienced when counseling White clients.

Past research supported the findings that students in counseling programs experience stereotyping when working with White clients (Hernández, et al., 2010; McDowell, 2004). Both McDowell and Hernández et al. found that interpersonal difficulties and stereotyping within the counseling interactions hinder black students’ academic potential and increase dissatisfaction with attendance at predominately-White universities. The findings from the current study suggest that programming does indeed fail to address the challenges that Black students experience when working with White clients.

If Black students leave their preparation feeling uncomfortable and without the appropriate training to address this discomfort in terms of counseling White clients, the Black students’ curriculum may be considered incomplete. This can limit how these students perform on the job when working with White clients. Conversely, if counseling programs provide White students with specific opportunities to learn about working with minority clients, then White students are

actually leaving more prepared to address the needs of a diverse client population than Black students are to counsel White clients. By not mentioning their feelings about and their comfort levels working with White clients, Black students can erroneously lead their professors to believe that they do not have concerns or difficulties in regards to their work with White clients.

Black students in this study visibly struggled with having to conform to White norms to prove their competence with White clients. They found themselves silenced for fear of negative judgment. Black students also felt compelled to code switch when working with White clients and display traits of a *model minority* to garner respect. Current literature support such strategies, which indicates that Black students can only have similar privileges to White students, when they conform to White societal norms or sanctioned cultural practices (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, these findings also suggest that such strategies may be burdensome and impede the student of color's training endeavors. Systemic and programmatic changes may be necessary to combat these oppressive experiences.

### **Implications for Educators**

The current accrediting standards in counseling programs mandate that all counselor educators include course content that increases the cultural competence of students when working with “diverse groups nationally and internationally”, and “diverse populations” (CACREP, 2009, p.10). Counselor educators' interpretations of the standards continue to overlook curriculum content that would be advantageous to the Black students' preparation experiences and interactions with White clients. To address this complex issue, accreditation organizations should include standards that explicitly assist Black students and other students of color (i.e. Latino, Asian American, Native American) in becoming competent and comfortable counseling White clients. Although revising the accrediting standards would be the most effective way to globally address

the needs of Black students as they relate to White clients, counseling programs need to ensure that faculty in these programs understand cross-cultural counseling dyads to encompass White and non-White clients and understand how to address the difficulties that may arise with Black students. Training counselor educators to address the impact of the Black counselor's race within the counseling relationship with White clients will demonstrate that Black students' curriculum needs are as important as those of their White colleagues are.

In programs, faculty members can begin to operationalize content related to Black students working with White clients by creating opportunities for students to participate in interactions where professionals are addressing the dynamic of Black counselors and White clients. Providing opportunities where students can explore the role of race, racism, societal oppression, and discrimination toward the counselor will aid counseling programs in producing curricula that are relevant to the lives of Black students and other students of color (i.e. Latino, Asian American, and Native American).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The strategies used to triangulate data only included interviews and course syllabi. Additional methods such as observations of counseling courses and supervision sessions may be useful for future research. Furthermore, the recruitment strategy limited this study. The researchers initially recruited the participants for this study because of the researchers' professional relationships with faculty members at both universities. It seems likely that these professors may have been more open to participating than average professors due to this relationship. Nevertheless, the participation of these individuals may have strengthened this study. As with all qualitative studies, researcher bias is a concern. The researchers had several experiences related to the studied topic, which were instrumental in their pursuing this line of

research. As a result, the researchers bracketed their experiences and attempted to remain close to the data by using the participants' own words and a peer reviewer to ensure data analysis accuracy.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

More research is necessary to explore the impact of the interactions of White clients and Black counselors within counseling relationships. Additional studies are also necessary to explore the preparation of other students of color (i.e. Latino, Asian American, and Native American), to determine how their experience compares to Black students. Furthermore, examine the students' experiences at HBCUs. These studies could illuminate how counselor educators address the Black counselor/White client dynamic at universities that primarily serve Black students. In addition, the perspectives of White students, international students, and faculty of color (i.e. Black, Latino, Asian American, Native American) may illuminate this research phenomenon. The White client perspectives with regard to their interactions with Black counselors have the potential illuminate this phenomenon.

The findings from this study provided considerable insight into the impact of colorblindness and exclusionary practices and supported the need to address minority students' interpersonal concerns in regards to counseling White clients. In addition, the findings encouraged programs and faculty to reflect on the role of perpetuating a curriculum that inadvertently marginalizes and discriminates against minority students.

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## Appendix A

### Student Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your current program and your status in the program
2. What is your ethnic and/or racial identity?
3. Tell a little about why you chose to respond to the interview solicitation
4. How well prepared do you think you are to counsel clients?
5. How well prepared do you feel you are to counsel white clients?
6. Do you perceive a need for preparation to counsel white clients?
7. What opportunities do you have to counsel white clients?
8. What challenges have you experienced as they relate to your earlier responses on curriculum and course preparation?

## Appendix B

### Faculty Interview Questions

1. How long have you been working at your current University?
2. What courses do you teach?
3. What is your ethnic and/or racial identity?
4. Tell a little about why you chose to respond to the interview solicitation
5. What Counselor Education program courses or curriculum activities do you perceive prepare minority students to counsel white clients?
6. How does your Counselor Education program's practicum or internship prepare minority students to counsel white clients?
7. How does your Counselor Education program's supervision prepare minority students to counsel white clients?
8. How does your Counselor Education program's faculty advising aid in preparing minority students to counsel white clients?

9. What teaching strategies and support do you think would be useful in training minority students to counsel white clients?
10. What opportunities do minority students have in counseling white clients?