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An Investigation of Ethnic Identity Development and Counselor Educators in their Ability to Recognizing Racial Microaggressions

Dr. Malik Aqueel Raheem
Counselor Education and Rehabilitation Department
California State University, Fresno

Drs. Charles E. Myers and Scott Wickman
Counseling, Adult and Higher Education Department
Northern Illinois University

Abstract

Supervisors assist counselors-in-training in becoming multiculturally competent counselors. Researchers examined the relationship between supervisors' ($N = 167$) racial/ethnic identity development status and their ability to recognize racial/ethnic microaggressions within supervision. Results indicated significant interaction between gender, multicultural supervision skills, and ethnic identity. Furthermore, results found significant relationship between ethnic identity development and ability to recognize racial microaggressions, but not in identifying type of microaggressions. Data analysis revealed improvement from previous research in counselor educator competence and comfort in addressing multicultural issues.

Introduction

In training counselors, focus is placed on helping clients examine their issues in counseling. The emphasis in multicultural counseling competence is facilitating students who are fearful and unaware in addressing personal biases by assisting students to confront personal biases (Arredondo, Tovar-Blank, & Parham, 2008). The primary focus of this study is counselor educators and counselor educators in training. A counselor educator, for the purpose of this study, is an individual who has completed advanced professional preparation in counseling and has earned a doctorate degree with the intention of becoming a university faculty member in a counselor preparation program or an advanced clinical counselor and supervisor (ACA, 2005). A counselor educator-in-training, for the purpose of this study, is an individual currently in the process of completing the academic requirements for the doctorate in counselor education and supervision (ACA, 2005). During this paper, *counselor educator* and *supervisor* will be used interchangeably. In this study, terms such as, *racial microaggressions* and *ethnic identity* will be defined and developed on how they influence the supervision working alliance and the counseling therapeutic relationship.

Ethnic Identity

According to Phinney (1992), *ethnic identity* is an aspect of a person's social identity and self-concept that derives from knowledge of membership in a social group and having value and emotional significance attached to membership in the group. This study's findings will contribute to counselor educators' understanding of multicultural counseling competence and the relationship among counselor educators' racial/ethnic identity development, recognition of racial microaggressions, and multicultural supervision.

Because of the lack of empirical research available on microaggressions and supervision, I wanted to find out (a) the influence of ethnic identity development on counselor educators' ability to recognize racial microaggressions, and (b) the influence gender has on counselor educators' ability to recognize racial microaggressions. Although the phenomenon of racial microaggressions is widespread, limited research exists on this topic. The research that has been conducted on racial microaggressions has shown that microaggressions are harmful to the psychosocial development of People of Color, especially African Americans (Sue et al., 2007).

The current study is important because therapeutic relationships are greatly affected by counselors' multicultural competence (Helms & Cook, 1999). Consequently, counselor educators have a responsibility to attempt to eliminate racial microaggressions from counselor training programs if they truly are to embrace what some have referred to as professional counseling's *fourth force* of multiculturalism (Sue et al., 2007).

This study's purpose was to examine doctoral counselor education and supervision students' and recently graduated counselor educators' ethnic identity development in relation to comfort and competence when addressing multicultural issues in supervision. Racial identity assessments measured the relationship between racial identity and recognition of racial microaggressions. At the same time, the covert behavior

of racial microaggressions was explored using a scale created from themes found in literature; thus, the following research questions and hypotheses were developed and examined.

Method

There were two primary foci of the proposed study. First, the relationship between counselor educator ethnic identity and the ability to recognize racial microaggressions were examined. Second, the relationship between counselor educators' comfort and competence discussing multicultural issues with ability to recognize racial microaggressions were examined. Two instruments were used to measure the constructs of ethnic identity and multicultural competence. Ethnic identity will be measured with the Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). Multicultural competence and comfort will be measured with the Multicultural Supervision Scale (Sangganjanavanich, 2010). The variable of racial microaggressions was measured with vignettes created from the literature and based on Nadal's (2011) Racial Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS).

Participants

Participants will be candidates and students of CACREP doctoral counselor education and supervision programs who have completed a supervision theory course and supervised a minimum of two master's students. Additional participants included recently graduated counselor educators and supervisors of CACREP doctoral program within the past three years. The recruitment of the collection of data was accomplished in two possible ways. First, I recruited and obtained permission from different universities that have CACREP accreditation at Association of Counselor Educators and Supervisors conference (ACES). Second, participants were recruited via posting on counselor educators' listserv (CESNET-L) with a hyper-link to Survey Monkey to collect data. Data was analyzed using a multivariate multiple regression model. For the purpose of this study, participants will be classified into two racial developmental groups, White non-Hispanic and a Persons of Color, as well as males and females. All ethnic groups are welcome to participate. One hundred twenty participants are targeted for the sample.

Instruments

Multicultural Supervision Scale (MSS) is a 40-item 5-point Likert scale assessment. Multicultural Supervision Scale is designed to assess the competence and comfort of counseling supervisors with discussing multicultural issues in supervision (Sangganjanavanich, 2008). The MSS can be divided into three factors: (a) Factor I is supervisory skills. Factor I contains 14 items that describe multicultural competence that supervisors demonstrate during supervision. Factor II is attitude and beliefs. Factor II contains 11 items and relates to the comfort, attitudes, and beliefs the supervisor has toward multiculturalism in supervision. Factor III is stereotypes toward diverse populations. Factor III contains 14 items and relates to the biases, stereotypes, and prejudice that may affect the supervision process (Sangganjanavanich, 2008). Coefficient α is reported for the total MSS as $\alpha = .88$. The factor I $\alpha = .78$, factor II $\alpha = .89$, and factor III $\alpha = .89$.

Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992) is a 20-item 4-point Likert scale assessment. The MEIM is designed to access the dominant status of ethnic identity development. The MEIM can be divided into three factors: (a) developmental, cognitive component and affirmation, (b) belonging and commitment, and (c) other-group orientation. The overall Coefficient α is reported as $\alpha = .81$. The factor I $\alpha = .78$, factor II $\alpha = .80$, and factor III $\alpha = .83$ (Phinney, 1992). Racial Microaggressions Vignette Checklist (RMVC) is a 10-item vignette with types of microaggressions assessing the participant ability for recognition and understanding types of racial microaggressions in supervision.

Hypotheses

There were six hypotheses examined in this study. These six include:

- There will be no difference between Persons of Color, male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MEIM score and their ability to identify types of racial microaggressions correctly on the RMVC.
- There will be no difference between White male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MEIM score and their ability to identify types of racial microaggressions correctly on the RMVC.
- There will be no difference between Persons of Color, male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MEIM score and their MSS score.
- There will be no difference between White male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MEIM score and their MSS score.
- There will be no difference between Persons of Color, male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MSS score and their ability to identify types of racial microaggressions correctly on the RMVC.
- There will be no difference between White male and female counselor educators in the relationship between their MSS score and their ability to identify types of racial microaggressions correctly on the RMVC.

Procedure

Counselors Educators attending CACREP-accredited doctoral programs were targeted. A brief description of the study was given to the potential participants via email on the counselor educators and supervisors listserv (CESNET-L). Potential participants were informed that if they were interested in participating to use the hyperlink that would forward them to the assigned destination. Participants were forwarded to the questionnaire that was preceded by the informed consent. The consent form along with the data was completed on a secured cyber-cabinet and will be destroyed after seven years. The personal information will not be reported; rather, the data will be aggregated. There was no penalty for participants who choose not to participate in the study. Participants completed an electronic questionnaire, an adapted version of the MEIM and the MSS. After completing the scales, the participants were allowed to respond with the RMVC.

Results

In measuring hypothesis one and two, a hierarchical linear regression model was used to measure relationships between gender, race/ethnicity, and recognition of racial microaggressions in relation to the MEIM score. The RMVC produced scores that were analyzed using a regression to determine if racial identity development predicted recognition and awareness of racial microaggressions. MEIM score was coded for high and low. This created a 2 x 4 matrix between the variables Gender and MEIM score of high and low.

In measuring hypothesis three and four, a hierarchical linear regression model was constructed. For this design, a 3 x 3 matrix were created. The two independent variables created by the MEIM score coded as high/low and gender completed the matrix with three different factorial subscales of the MSS (a) supervisor skills, (b) attitudes and beliefs, and (c) stereotypes toward diverse populations. The different factorial subscale scores defined the columns and the MEIM score, race/ethnicity, and gender defined the rows.

In measuring hypothesis five and six, a hierachal regression model were used to determine the relationship between the variables of the MSS and the dichotomous variable of RMVC scores, gender, and race/ethnicity. A 3 x 3 matrix was created. The rows were defined with RMVC, gender, and ethnicity. The columns were defined with the MSS scores.

Racial Microaggression Vignette Checklist

The RMVC consists of eight vignettes. The RMVC was recoded to two scales of correct and incorrect. First, the RMVC was scored on whether the participants were able to identify correctly if there was a racial microaggression. If participants were correct, then they were scored on if they correctly identified the type of racial microaggression. If participants were unable to identify correctly a racial microaggression, then it was coded as zero. The results are presented in Table 1. The hierachal regression model revealed no statistical significant relationship between MEIM scores and ability to identify racial microaggression vignettes. The regression model revealed statistical significance ($p < .05$) with gender, ethnicity, or race in relationship with identifying a racial microaggression vignette. The logistic regression model revealed statistical significance ($p < .05$) only with the predictors of ethnicity x gender with the relationship of correctly selecting a racial microaggression. The results are summarized in Table 1. Logistic regression model indicates that MEIM score was statistically significant in participants' ability in distinguishing between whether a racial microaggression had occurred in vignette.

Table 1
Logistic Regression Model: MEIM x RMVC

	B	SE B	ΔR^2	β
Model 1				.33**
Race/Ethnic	3.45	.67	.40**	
Gender	3.05	.55	.30**	
Model 2				.102
MEIM	1.25	.34	.22	

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the number of participants who correctly identified the right response for whether there was a racial microaggression was high. However, the number of participants who were able to identify correctly the type of racial microaggression was low. Many participants decided to discontinue the questionnaire. The predictor was based off whether participants were able to identify if a racial microaggression occurred. However, the number of participants' responses that would be classified as missed was too extreme to be included in the logistic regression model. Logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous. As with other regression models as well as other statistical procedures, the size and nature of the sample is important. In a tier design, some of the data would be considered missing if a person was not forwarded to that particular screen. This would lower my sample size. Thus, it would not be possible to run a logistic regression on the identifying the type of racial microaggression.

Table 2
Frequency of Correctly Identifying Racial Microaggressions by Gender

Variable	Frequency			Percent	Type
	Male	Female	Total		
African American Male	42	107	149	95%	65
White Counselor	29	77	106	68%	45
Latina	35	87	122	78%	45
White Master student	34	88	122	78%	40
Clinch purse	23	56	79	52%	35
Industrial pollution	2	1	3	2%	*
Date	33	81	114	78%	20
Note on door	37	86	123	84%	55

Male $n = 45$ Female $n = 113$

An analysis of the RMVC revealed that those who scored well overall in both gender and ethnic/racial identity development performed well in identifying if a racial microaggression was present. Table 2 demonstrates that there was no significant difference between males and females selecting whether a racial microaggression had occurred. In focusing on possible gender differences on selecting if a racial microaggression had occurred, participants were above 65% correct on almost all vignettes. Table 3 shows the results of ethnic/racial identity development and identifying a racial microaggression. Both ethnic identity development groups (Person of Color and White) performed well on identifying whether a racial microaggression occurred.

Participants

of both ethnic/racial categories were able to identify that a racial microaggression occurred in the vignette.

Table 3
Frequency of Correctly Identifying Racial Microaggressions by Ethnicity/Race
People of Color $n = 54$ White $n = 102$

Variable	Frequency			Percent	Type
	People of Color	White	Total		
African American Male	51	98	149	95%	65
White Counselor	40	66	106	68%	45
Latina	41	81	122	79%	45
White Master student	41	81	122	78%	40
Clinch purse	27	52	79	55%	35
Industrial pollution	1	2	3	2%	*
Date	38	76	114	78%	20
Note on door	41	82	123	84%	55

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to measure counselor educators' comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues in supervision as well as ability to recognize racial microaggressions. This study's findings will contribute to counselor educators' understanding of multicultural counseling competence and the relationship among counselor educators' racial/ethnic identity development, recognition of racial microaggressions, and multicultural supervision.

Racial and cultural issues in supervision have received a limited amount of empirical attention; the studies that have been done found that ethnic identity development was essential in multicultural counseling competence (Bhat & Davis, 2007; Helms & Cook, 1999). A dearth of studies also exists on supervisor comfort discussing multicultural issues, especially the covert form of racism referred to as *racial microaggressions*, which are hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights to the targeted person. Racial microaggressions and multicultural issues can be major factors within supervisory relationships. This restricted body of research was unexpected, considering the inherent power and privilege differences within supervisory relationships.

Because of the lack of empirical research available on microaggressions and supervision, I wanted to find out (a) counselor educators' current levels of comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues, (b) the influence ethnic identity development has on counselor educators' comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues, (c) the influence of ethnic identity development on counselor educators' ability to recognize racial microaggressions, and (d) the influence gender has on counselor educators' ability to recognize racial microaggressions.

Although participants had difficulty identifying microaggression type, the majority were able to identify that "something was wrong" with the vignettes.

Synthesis of Results

Findings of this study contradict previous findings on supervisor comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues with supervisees. Constantine (2001) found that 70% of counseling supervisors did not feel comfortable discussing multicultural issues in supervision. In the current study, participants scored high on all MSS factors. These results suggest that CACREP-accredited doctoral programs ha

This study's findings support ethnic identity development literature. Previous researchers (e.g., Constantine, 2001; Helms, 2001) discussed how advanced ethnic identity development increases cognitive complexity. These studies support the assumption that advanced cognitive complexity increases counselor educators' ability to be multiculturally competent.

MEIM

Clients will benefit from multicultural-competent counselors by receiving counseling services that will address clients' needs in a multicultural-competent paradigm. Multicultural literature supports this finding. Multicultural literature and research shows that increasing the cognitive complexity of counselors will increase their comprehension of multicultural issues and dynamics (Constantine et al., 2008). Counselors increased comprehension of multicultural issues and dynamics would facilitate development in the components of multicultural competence in skills, ability and beliefs, and knowledge. Counselor educators' increased MEIM scores demonstrate an increase in their comfort, security, and acceptance of their ethnic identity and comfort with other groups.

RMVC

Although the majority of literature on racial microaggressions focuses on African Americans, all ethnic minorities are potential targets of racial microaggressions. Many Asian Americans and Latino Americans report that they are commonly seen as perpetual foreigners (Sue et al., 2007). Many ethnic minorities may look at the counselor as an authority figure because of the power dynamics may be unlikely to question or point out the racial bias. This causes the client to harbor resentment and ill feelings toward the counselor. Clients of Color are at increased risk of not continuing in the therapeutic relationship when racial microaggressions occur. They may not receive the assistance they need, and worse, they may leave counseling feeling worse than when they began counseling. Counselors can convey their bias to their clients of Color in myriad of ways such as minimizing symptoms of Asian Americans on the basis of the false "model" minority (Sue et al., 2007) or by placing greater emphasis on symptoms such as paranoid delusions and substance abuse in Native Americans, Latino Americans, or African American clients who are believed to suffer from these afflictions. Previous research (Constantine et al., 2008) has indicated ethnic identity development is an essential component to becoming self-aware of biases, stereotypes, and internalized racism.

Counselor educators who operate at an advanced ethnic identity status are better able to recognize possible racial microaggressions that may occur in the supervision session or their supervisees' counseling session with clients. Racial microaggressions can be detrimental to therapeutic relationships with clients. It is

important for counselor educators to recognize racial microaggressions because counselor educators, through supervision, consultation, and education, have an indirect effect on therapeutic relationships. It is also important for counselor educators to recognize racial microaggressions because of the possibility of their occurrence in supervision sessions with supervisees. Racial microaggressions can negatively impact the working alliance. This finding echoes the results for an earlier study where supervisory dyads' working alliance suffered from lack of trust between cross-racial supervisory dyads (Bhat & Davis, 2007). An inherent power differential exists in supervision between supervisors and supervisees. The working alliance between supervisors and counselors has a major impact on the therapeutic relationship between counselors and clients.

Synthesis Summary

Supervisors' comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues in supervision enhances supervisees' therapeutic relationships. Clients of Color can benefit from counselors who receive improved multicultural supervision. There is a distrust of counseling in many ethnic communities (Constantine, 2001). Clients of Color can benefit with extended counseling services. Many clients of Color leave the counseling relationship after only one session (Constantine, 2001). Constantine stated that many clients of Color do not feel that their White counselors understand their perspective in counseling sessions. In a later study, Constantine and Sue (2007) found themes of racial microaggressions with counselor education and counselor psychology doctoral programs, one of which was offering culturally insensitive treatment recommendations and blaming clients of Color on problems with oppression.

Because many People of Color may have experienced racial microaggressions, they may have increased sensitivity to being able to recognize racial microaggressions. Constantine and Sue found several themes that counselor education and counseling psychology Black doctoral students experienced related to racial microaggressions perpetrated by their White supervisors in their programs. This result is encouraging for multicultural counseling competence and multicultural supervision, as many counselor educators enter academia, agency work, consultation, private practice, and so forth. Regardless of employment setting, counselor educators are leaders in the training, preparing, and developing of future multiculturally competent counselors. It is essential that counselor educators be competent and comfortable in multicultural issues, including racial microaggressions. Counseling is a profession based on growth and development. This result appears to indicate that counselor educators have become more comfortable and competent in addressing multicultural issues in supervision. The multicultural counseling movement has revolutionized traditional training methods of counselor educators, supervisors, and counselors on how they think about mental health and their approach to clients (D'Andrea & Heckman, 2008).

Implications for CACREP Programs

CACREP programs need to support counselor educators-in-training overcoming fear and resistance to discussing ethnic/racial topics by fostering safe

and productive learning environments and increasing education on racial microaggressions. The education and training of counselor educators must aid counselor educators to (a) increase their ability to identify racial microaggressions; (b) understand how racial microaggressions, including their own, detrimentally affect clients of Color; and (c) accept responsibility for taking corrective actions to overcome racial biases.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the findings are from self-report assessments. The variable of social desirability needs to be accounted for in the results. This study did not have any mechanism to verify or cross-reference the accuracy of participant self-reports. The reliance on solely self-report presents a threat to validity.

A second limitation was the limited number of counselor educators of Color, as well as limited number of males, in this study. The small number of participant ethnic diversity in the study suggests that there is a drastic need to increase recruitment of males of Color into professional counseling. The small number of ethnically diverse participants prevented analyzing different ethnic groups individually.

A third limitation of this study was lack of psychometrics for the RMVC. There were no reliability or validity checks conducted on this measurement. Adequate assessment tools need to be created to explore the dynamics of racial microaggressions effectively. Although some assessments measure the existence of microaggressions, none distinguish between microaggression categories. A lack of psychometrics on the RMVC will make the validity and reliability difficult, if not impossible.

A fourth limitation of this study was the participant recruitment procedure used. The survey was limited to self-selection by members of CESNET listserv. Participants who have access to listserv may have unique qualities that may have skewed the results. The cross-sectional study may also have been influenced by an interest in the research topic and this interest of the topic may influence the results.

Finally, the lack of ability to identify the type of racial microaggression, does not indicate the counselor educator's ability to recognize racial microaggressions, but may more indicate lack of specific education about microaggression types.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest that future research on the counselor educator comfort and competence addressing multicultural issues in supervision is needed to build upon what has been found in this and other studies. Future studies might include both counselor educators and supervisees completing evaluations on counselor educators' ability to address multicultural issues. Supervisee reports would provide a balance to counselor educators' self-reports.

Helms and Cook (1999) noted that racial consciousness is a critical consideration in determining counselors' ability to operate successfully in cross-racial dyads. A future study could possibly use Helms (1999) racial identity scales in

addition to the MEIM to increase understanding of how ethnic identity development influences multicultural competence in supervision.

The development of a reliable and valid scale to measure racial microaggressions in counseling would help minimize some possible shortcomings with this study. A measure of racial microaggressions would address the possible shortcoming of the RMVC by ensuring racial microaggressions and the type of racial microaggressions is actually being measured. The measure would also have a form of consistency in the results.

Future researchers might study racial microaggressions through video vignettes of racial microaggressions happening within counseling and supervision sessions while participants demonstrate proficiency to identify racial microaggressions while they are happening. The application of video vignettes would allow counselor educators, supervisors, and counselors to demonstrate their proficiency in recognizing racial microaggressions while happening. Mental health professionals will be able to address possible racial microaggressions that happen within their classrooms, supervision sessions, or counseling sessions. As an end result, mental health professionals will be able to better service clients. Ideally, future research will focus on supervisors' racial identity and the relationship competence and comfort of discussing with supervisees multicultural counseling competence in dyadic and triadic supervision relationships. Research will also focus on supervisors' ability to recognize and discuss racial microaggressions with supervisees in dyadic and triadic supervision relationships. Both research possibilities will be important to focus because of the inherent privilege of the supervisors' position. Recently, doctoral counselor education programs have implemented multicultural training. Programs establishing multicultural counseling training to doctoral students will help increase the students' cognitive complexity. Multicultural counseling training will challenge some students' worldviews, thus, students will have schemas challenged. Students will facilitate increased development of racial identity, which is essential to self-awareness. Consequently, supervisors will have an improved competence to assist supervisees with multicultural issues.

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