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ABSTRACT

A personal account is given about counseling people of color in light of the fact that training and information about multicultural counseling was not part of counselor education programs 20 years ago. Recent attendance at a graduate level course on cultural diversity prompted this counselor to consider many issues. The concept of historical hostility and the neglect of a client's history are discussed. A review is provided of historical research on the distorted development and use of various testing instruments based upon the assumption of a counselor's unexamined biases. The phenomenon of White privilege, particularly White male privilege, is highlighted. The account concludes with a discussion of the terms culture, ethnicity, and race. Questions concerning the future use of the word, "race," are considered. (JDM)

A Licensed Professional Counselor's Professional and Personal Insights and Changes Resulting from a University Course on Cultural Diversity

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**A Licensed Professional Counselor's
Professional and Personal Insights and Changes
Resulting from a University Course on Cultural
Diversity**

ABSTRACT

At age forty-two, this Licensed Professional Counselor is now learning that the professional training she received twenty years ago is not appropriate for use with people of color. Twenty years ago, training and information about multicultural counseling competencies was not required in the university counseling programs in Texas. Fortunately, today such training is required in order to become a Licensed Professional Counselor in Texas. This presentation highlights the issues and facts most emotionally absorbed by this counselor/student while participating in a graduate level class on cultural diversity.

From Pedersen (1987), four of the ten assumptions specifically influential on this counselor will be discussed. Within the assumption concerning the neglect of the client's history, the concept of historical hostility, first presented by Vontress (1996) will be introduced. From the assumption concerning a counselor's unexamined biases, Gould's (1996) historical research on the distorted development and use of various testing instruments will be discussed. To answer this counselor's question of "why am I just now learning this?," the phenomenon of white privilege and of white male privilege (McIntosh, 1988) will be highlighted. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the terms culture, ethnicity and race. Questions concerning the future use of the term/word "race" will be entertained using Cameron and Wycoff (1998) as a guide.

I began realizing that I was missing something during my second year as a Special Education School Counselor. I had escaped to the public school system from the psychiatric field which had begun to economically deteriorate around me. I had sensed that I was missing several elements from my life with one of those elements being the expression of maternal instincts. Now in the school system, surrounded by children, my maternal feelings bloomed and I enjoyed being a counselor. I felt more complete. Still, I struggled to know some of my students. I struggled to build rapport with my students of color. What was I doing wrong? What was I missing? Fortunately, I had the opportunity of having an Hispanic student assigned to me for counseling who ended up educating and counseling me.

My student was by all American public school rules and standards a trouble maker. He was only fifteen, yet he already had two jobs. He would rather go to work than to school, and he skipped school to go to work. He “owed” the Texas Education Agency and the State of Texas many summer or Saturday “school days” to make up for his

absences and failing grades. Yet, my student was always clean and nicely dressed, and he was always respectful to me as well as the truancy officer. After four months of trying traditional techniques to motivate him to come to school, I told him I was confused and asked him to please tell me what was going on. I felt lost. Thank goodness my student choose to talk with me. He smiled and began to tell me what he valued and what was important to him. He mentioned his mother, his family members in Mexico, and his role as provider since his father and older brother had left them. This was my first real experience with cultural diversity counseling, but I did not know it at the time. I did not have the words "cultural diversity counseling" in my vocabulary. Since then, my vocabulary has grown. I am grateful for the positive changes that I have experienced from taking a graduate cultural diversity class.

The changes I have experienced started while reading Pedersen's (1987) article about counseling assumptions. Now, I had words, phrases, and concepts to help describe and explain what I had been missing. Four of the ten assumptions particularly impacted me:

fragmentation by academic disciplines, focus on changing the individual instead of the system, neglect of history, and dangers of encapsulation. I have two graduate degrees in disciplines related to counseling, Sociology and Rehabilitation Counseling. Yet, I do not recall specifically discussing multicultural issues while earning my degrees. The issues and ideas studied in sociology are correlated to the external stresses that many people of color and diverse backgrounds have to contemplate daily in order to survive. It seems that it would be helpful to apply our knowledge concerning complex organizations and institutions, and implement structures and systems to prevent cultural bias. Rehabilitation counseling is directed towards affirming a diverse group of people, those with a disability. I recall excellent training and teaching about how to counsel with someone whose speech may be impaired, who may have a visual impairment, or who may have physical limitations. However, I do not recall discussing what possible ramifications could occur in counseling if the person with a disability was also a person of color. Multicultural issues were not yet apparent.

My Hispanic student who first taught me about cultural differences, was being punished for not fitting into the school system. The school was not acknowledging his family's history or background. The system did not respect the importance of loyalty he felt for his family members in Mexico. This ignorance resulted in further distrust and isolation between the family and school personnel. Unexamined assumptions were preventing any kind of communication between the school and the family. I read Vontress' (1996) article and I realized that I knew what historical hostility looked like. My feelings of guilt for being part of the problem began to swell.

As my cultural diversity class continued, I read chapter five from Gould's (1996) *The Mismeasure of Man*. Now, I was also angry. When I read Gould's chapter, I lost a lot of respect for my own profession. The very foundation upon which my profession is based is warped. I felt like I had been "duped". Alfred Binet's test was used against his wishes to label people, to try to prove that people of color and certain immigrants to America were inferior to people with white skin, EuroAmericans. Gould's chapter opened

my eyes to the fact that most theories, instruments, and approaches were developed by men, European men. The theories do not incorporate women and people of color. We, as counselors, must work toward learning and developing new models and theories that do incorporate elements and factors of cultural diversity.

Reading next about White privilege and male privilege from McIntosh (1995), my feelings of guilt and anger merged. I was not aware of my privileged status until I read this article. I discovered that I was an oppressor. I was aware of the male privilege status, but not my own status as a White female. Being an oppressor, not acknowledging the dominant culture system, in turn oppresses me. The dominant culture obstructs my own development and most blatantly obstructs the development of people of color. I do not want to be part of the problem, I want to be part of the solution. The conferred dominance or privilege I have is an illusion. I must become more self-aware. How have I been hindered by this dominant culture? I had to be assertive and loud to hold the attention of my parents and others. Parental expectations were never as

high for me as they were for my brother. The standardized school exams I took were normed with male participants, not female participants. Other questions I had were more difficult yet still needed addressing. How much of my father's arrogant attitude towards my mother's career success was part of his human personality and how much of his arrogant attitude is a result of this male privilege dominant culture in our society?

This discovery or acknowledgment of the dominant culture has caused me to review my moral condition, my belief system, my relationship with my Higher Power. I do not want my relationship with God to be an illusion. I must tease apart the man-made dominant culture religiosity from my spiritual beliefs. What has helped me to absorb this information within myself is to use a variation of the twelve step model. This approach has helped me to assimilate and to accommodate this information cognitively and emotionally.

1. I admit that I am a person with unearned privileges.
2. I believe that a Higher Power can help me change.

3. I ask God for help.
4. I make a moral inventory of myself.
5. I admit to God and another human being the exact nature of my wrongs.
6. I ask God to remove these defects of character.
7. I ask God to remove my shortcomings.
8. I make a list of those I have hurt and be willing to make amends.
9. I make amends directly if no further harm is done.
10. I continue to take a personal inventory of self and when wrong, admit it.
11. I pray for God to continue to help me carry out His will.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, I help others by educating them about oppression and practice the principles within these twelve steps in everyday life.

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of this cultural diversity course has led me to change at the personal level. Change must occur at a personal level before our society can change.

Why do we seemingly automatically think of skin color when we hear the term or word "race"? Why don't we think of the Summer Olympic track and swim races, or

the Indianapolis 500 car race instead? While reading from the Cameron and Wycoff (1998) article, I realized that I never really before concentrated on my ethnicity or culture. I need to know my own background to be a competent multicultural counselor. As I studied and learned, I began to understand why using the term "White" to describe my race negates my heritage, my history, my ethnicity.

My ethnicity includes relatives from Sweden, Germany, England, Scotland, and Native American Cherokee Indian. My father's family came to America from Sweden to escape the dominant Lutheran religion. Once here, they changed their last name from Carlson to Linstrum. My maternal great grandfather changed his first name from Klas Henning to Henry to be more American. My father's relatives were intellectuals, but they were poor. My mother's family probably came to America a hundred years before my father's family. They were very poor and illiterate. They chopped cedar for a living. My mother's paternal great grandmother was a Cherokee Indian. My mother was an only child and she died in 1986, so obtaining firm facts about my mother's relatives is difficult.

My culture is American or even Texan. If you heard me speak, you would know that I am a Texan.

This is all to emphasize that the term “race” and the words that are used to identify individuals in terms of race (White, Black, Hispanic, other) really do not describe us as individuals within the human family at all. It seems that our diversity is too great to be categorized. Racial lines will be blurred in the future as people with multiracial backgrounds are born. No checked box on a form or application is going to truly identify anyone because we are all multicultural and diverse.

This presentation and paper has been a cathartic experience for me. I am very happy to have experienced academia at its best, when true learning and personal growth occur. I am grateful to my professor, Dr. Carmen Salazar, for being my teacher. I plan to continue to learn and grow and ask a lot of questions.

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