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Exploration of African-American Counselor-in-Training Group Core Skills: Importance and Confidence Level

Levette S. Scott*

North Carolina Central University, USA

Mahmud Mansaray

North Carolina Central University, USA

Jennifer C. Barrow

North Carolina Central University, USA

Kyla Marie Sawyer-Kurian

North Carolina Central University, USA

Suzan Z. Wasik

North Carolina Central University, USA

Elizabeth Ghekier

North Carolina Central University, USA

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Abstract: This study explored through applied statistics the importance and confidence levels of African American counselors-in-training core group counseling skills while at the same determining the difference among their colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to assess core group counseling skills while at the same determining the difference among their colleagues of differing ethnic backgrounds. Participants were sixty-eight counselors-in-training enrolled in a Group Counseling Course in the spring of 2015 and fall of 2016. Of the sixty-eight participants 38 (55.88%) African Americans and 27 (39.71%) White/Caucasian had an opportunity to complete the Core Group Work Skills Inventory - Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC) as an extra credit assignment pre- and post their group counseling facilitation experience. Results suggest African American participants had confidence in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders. A significant difference and a very large effect between pre-test and post-test of African American counselor-in-training importance level of the individual behavioral items in the CGWSI-IC items were seen. Implications for specific training for African Americans in group counseling for core group counseling skills should be examined.

Keywords: *Core group counseling skills, African-American, CGWSI-IC.*

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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore African American counselors-in-training (AACIT) group core skills (GCS) in order to determine how important these GCS are to group counseling and how confident they are in these skills. This research will also seek to provide strategies to assist AACIT to incorporate diversity competencies practices related to group counseling leadership. For this study, some of GCS core skills are a) encourages member participation; b) engage in appropriate self-disclosure; c) give and receive feedback; d) maintain eye contact; e) asking open-ended questions; f) using encouraging responses; g) attend to and acknowledge member behavior; and h) to clarify and summarize member statements (Jacob et al., 2016; Shera et al., 2013). These GCS core skills will be measured using the 82-item *Core Group Work Skills Inventory - Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC)* created by Wilson et al. (2008). They are embedded within the instrument in some direct wording and implied wording as well (Erford, 2011, as cited in Wilson et al., 2008).

African American counselor-in-training (AACIT) experiences and training in counseling education programs is a relatively new area of research. According to Jones et al. (2009), until the late 1970s, mental health professionals were not included in a majority of study, including job satisfaction. As a result, research on professionals in the mental health field was lacking; research on African American professionals and professionals-in-training in the area was almost non-existent (Jones et al., 2009). Today, there continues to be a paucity of research on counselors, specifically African American mental health counselors (Baker & Moore, 2015; Eason, 2009; Henfield et al., 2013; Schneider et al., 2009). Sue and Sue (2013)

* Corresponding author:

Levette S. Scott, Licensed School Counselor, North Carolina Central University, Counselor Education, USA ✉ levette.scott@nccu.edu



noted for counselors of color in training (COCIT) "...there may be a need for customized training as they counsel Whites and other persons of color" (p. 2).

As the counseling field seeks to be more inclusive in its training and preparation of marginalized populations, more research is needed regarding African American counselors and the experiences of AACIT. As a result, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), recognized the need to adjust standards to serve diverse student populations and create a more inclusive learning environment for all students (Henfield et al., 2013). In a study by Johnson et al. (2007), African American students made up 17.9% of 825 students from 29 CACREP-accredited doctoral programs in 2009 (as cited in Henfield et al., 2013). Even though the number of AACIT is low, the focus seems to be to strengthen training for White counselors in their work with persons of color rather than assisting AACIT in White counseling clients. African American students seem to experience a lack of support and engagement with faculty, including mentoring and role-play scenarios counseling White clients.

Henfield et al. (2013) study with African American students in counselor education programs assessed their experiences as counseling students using two interviews. The research found African American students experienced isolation, peer disconnection or lack of cohesion with other students, and cultural misunderstandings and disrespect from the faculty (Redmond & Slaney, 2002). Experiences of AACIT and other minority students in counselor education programs include having to explain their cultural identity, mannerisms, and speech patterns, or having to hide this part of self to succeed similarly to their White peers. Minority students felt they had to work harder and alter the way they were perceived to succeed (Baker & Moore, 2015; Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Feelings of self-doubt and stress were also reported having an impact on whether or not African American students remained in their graduate training program (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013). The students also experienced feelings of uncertainty surrounding the cause, source, or fault of negative encounters with peers and faculty.

Lastly, students frequently experienced varying levels of perceived ability to express themselves and their ideas. For example, AACIT may be misunderstood or unfairly assessed because their body language, vernacular, or cadence is perceived as disrespectful through the lens of White classmates and instructors. Students did express positive experiences as well, such as support received by peers, friends, family, and faculty (Baker & Moore, 2015). These studies and others like it noticed the negative experiences of African American counselor education students and the lack of available research on the topic (Baker & Moore, 2015; Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Henfield et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2009; Schneider et al., 2009). This study seeks to address the need for counselor education programs to address the unique training needs of African-American counselor-in-training in group counseling coursework and experiences.

African American Counselor in Training Group Counseling Training

Group counseling is a mandatory core training area in CACREP-accredited programs. Training standards are designed to address the needs of all counseling students. Focus on improvement is not just for Caucasian students but also needed to assess the skills of persons of color and, more specifically, African-American trainees. Again, seemingly, the focus in counselor education cultural competence training is geared toward White students' needs to serve persons of color rather than preparing AACIT to work with White clients (Sawyer-Kurian et al., 2017). Although many topics are addressing AACIT and the issues they may face, much of the research does not discuss how AACIT express their *confidence* levels in practicing and performing core group skills. Also, there is a lack of research on AACIT experiences with and concerns related to the *importance* of core group counseling skills to become productive group facilitators of non-African American clients. This research will use the items from the Core Group Work Skills Inventory - Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC) measure as an assessment framework. This research study seeks to understand AACIT's confidence in their core group counseling skills; to understand how important they view core group counseling skills, and understand how they may be prepared in their training program to be a successful group counselor facilitator.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the importance and confidence levels of African American counselors-in-training core group counseling skills while at the same determining the difference among their colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds. The research questions are: 1) What is the difference between "*evidence ethical practice in group membership or leadership*" in the importance and confidence levels of the overall group counselors-in-training?; 2) What are the mean differences among the core group work counseling skills of African-American and other counselors-in-training and as it relates to importance and confidence levels?; 3) What is the relationship, direction and strengthen between the importance and confidence levels of African-American and other counselors-in-training as it relates to core group counseling skills?; 4) How are the pre and posttest of the importance and confidence level of African American different with core group counseling skills?

Methodology

Research Goal

The research design took a similar model as Shera et al. (2013). Shera and colleagues (2013) researched core group leadership skills of social workers taking a social work group course. For this study, counselors-in-training taking a Principles of Group Counseling Course at a southeastern, historically black university in an urban area were recruited throughout Spring 2015 to Fall 2016 (Table 1). The graduate counselor-in-training students were asked to complete a *Core Group Work Skills Inventory - Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC)* created by Wilson, Newmeyer, Rapin, and Conyne (Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). The approval of the usage of this instrument was provided by one of the authors.

Sample and Data Collection

The *CGWSI-IC* evaluates counselors-in-training beliefs about the *importance* of core leadership skills and their *confidence* with these skills. The *important* component of the assessment used in the study asks questions like *How important is it for you to be a skilled group participant?* and *How important is it for you to be an experienced group leader?* (Wilson & Newmeyer, 2008). The 27-item survey used a 4 point Likert-type scale (1=very unimportant- very important=4). The *confidence* component defined in this section depicts how confident the students are in conducting the core group counseling skills. The *confidence* scale is similar, with one being very unconfident and four being very confident. Participation in the study was voluntary, however, completion of the survey was mandatory for the course. The students who participated were provided with five points of extra credit to participate. Students completed the *CGWSI-IC* one week before the group facilitation and a week after their group facilitation was completed in a 14-week course. Students scheduled their group facilitation times at the beginning of the semester.

The psychometric properties of the *CGWSI-IC* address internal consistency of the *importance* and *confidence* scales on the instrument inventory with two split-half coefficients. The first half has odd-numbered items from the *importance* scale while aggregated with even numbers from the *confidence* scale. The second-half coefficient is vice versa to the first half. Where the even numbers from the *importance* scale were grouped to the odd numbers for the *confidence* scale. The psychomotor of the *CGWSI-IC* includes,

The Spearman-Brown coefficient (even length) was .988 (n=91), Cronbach's Alpha = .973, (n=91); for the split-half coefficient the scale was split into odd and even number items resulting in Spearman-Brown coefficient (even length) of .986 (n=91). For the Perceived *Confidence* scale, Cronbach's Alpha was .977 (n=91), the same strategy for splitting the scale (even-numbered items first, then odd-numbered questions) resulted in Spearman-Brown coefficient (even length) of .987 (n=91; Shera et al., 2013).

Procedure

Participation in the study was voluntary. Students were asked to create a code (mother's first name and birth year) to ensure the confidentiality of the students taking the course. For example, if the students' mother's first name is Susan and born 1973, their code will be SUSAN1973. The students who participated were asked to complete four *CGWSI-ICs total*; two the week before group facilitation began (one with code and one without) and two the week after their actual group facilitation (one with code and one without). The coded *CGWSI-IC* forms were collected and placed in a sealed envelope and placed in a secure, locked location. All students participated in the study. If a student did not participate, they would have been allowed to complete another extra credit assignment (i.e., written assignment).

Demographic and previous group experience information was also collected. SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics from the *CGWSI-IC* (leadership skills) were analyzed using the SPSS software.

Participants

The sample included counselor-in-training students in face-to-face and online *Principles and Procedures of Group Counseling* from Spring 2015 to Spring 2017 (Table 1) in a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The sample were sixty-eight counselors in training, fifty-seven percent (n=39) of the sample counselors in training were mental health trainees, nineteen percent (n=13) were career trainees, and twenty-two percent (n=15) were school counselor trainees. Sixty-eight percent (n =38) were from Black/African-American descent, twenty-seven percent (n = 27) were White/Caucasian descent, and three percent (n = 2) were other. The age of the counselors-in-training ranged from 18-28 years (n = 40; 58.82%), 29-39 years (n = 21; 30.88%), and 40-51 years (n = 5; 7.35%). One semester was completed by sixty percent (n=41) of the counselors-in- training, two semesters twelve percent (n=8), three semesters thirteen percent (n=9), and four semesters thirteen percent (n=9) of the trainees completed in a two-three-year program. The program of study varies from two to three years, depending on the track. For example, the career counseling degree program may be completed in two years, while the 60-hour clinical mental health program would require three years of coursework. Twenty-five percent (n=17) had experience with group counseling while seventy-five (n=51) did not have experience with group counseling.

Table 1. Statistics on Group Counseling Offered by First Author

Semester	Students	AA	Other	Males (AA)	Females (AA)
Spring 2015	13	8	5	1	7
Fall 2015	12	7	5	2	5
Spring 2016	15	8	7	0	8
*Spring 2016	11	10	1	0	10
Fall 2016	5	5	3	1	4
Total	59	38	21	4	34

*Taught Online; African American (AA)

Methodology

The methodology for the contemporary research examination is the quantitative design and the data are the students' responses from the Core Group Work Skills Inventory (CGWSI) survey. The methodology encompasses some model specifications.

Model Specification: A principal inference in the contemporary research assumes the application of the CGWSI instrument whose elements describe a behavior which may be useful in determining the effectiveness as a group member or leader displays internal consistency in the pre-test and post-test evaluations of students in the work skill review. The model for this postulation is the Cronbach's alpha (α), after Cronbach (1951). Therefore, inferencing Field (2013), the model description for the Cronbach's alpha is the Equation (1), which is applicable to determine the reliability of the CGWSI instrument:

$$\frac{E^2 \text{Covariance}}{\sum s_{item}^2 + \sum \text{Cov}_{item}} \quad (1)$$

The model in Equation (1) clearly stipulates a rating scale encompassing some items, and it is likely to calculate the variance enclosed within an individual item, as well as the covariance among a definite item and any additional item on the evaluation scale. Consequently, a variance-covariance matrix compilation of the wide-ranging items becomes likely. Given this, referring to Field (2013), the transverse principles in the matrix identify the variance within a definite item, and the off-transverse principles encircled covariances inside the assortments of items. The upper half of the model is the square of the quantity of items (G) multiplied by the mean covariance amongst the items. The lower half of the model seems to be the comprehensive item variances and item covariances. The size of the Cronbach's alpha statistic spreads from 0 to 1. Field (2013) even emphasized the greater the spread, the uniqueness are the selected items synchronized as a group in evaluating the design construct and, thus, the uniqueness is the reliability of the assessing design. Consequently, a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 1 essentially indicates an effortlessly reliable rating instrument, and a coefficient alpha of 0 indicates an untrustworthy rating instrument.

The associated inference in the existing research assumes the CGWSI instrument whose items describe a behavior possibly useful in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or leader, displays no significant difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test responses of participants on the selected items in the rating scale, for categories of importance and confidence. The appropriate model for this assumption is the paired-sample *t*-test. A paired-sample *t*-test is applicable to analyze paired scores, which forms the basis for the supplementary inferences. Therefore, drawing directly from Field (2013), the model specification is the Equation (2), and is relevant in determining any significant difference between the means of the pretest and posttest responses of participants on the selected items in the rating scale:

$$t = \frac{\bar{D} - \mu_D}{S_D / \sqrt{N}} \quad (2)$$

The model compares the main difference between the selected samples, \bar{D} , and the expected difference between population means, μ_D , in addition to taking into consideration the standard error of the differences, S_D / \sqrt{N} . Consequently, Field (2013) noted if the null hypothesis was true, then should be no difference between the population means, that is, $\mu_D = 0$.

Results

A significant supposition in the contemporary research, displayed in Equation (1), assumed the use of the CGWSI instrument established reliability in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader. The analysis encompassed and satisfied a primary examination of the assumption of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variance, and sample independence. Equation (1) applied the Cronbach's alpha statistic, to resolve the subject of the reliability of the CGWSI instrument in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader. The results of the totality of the research embraced a primary descriptive analysis (e.g. mean, maximum, minimum, etc.), to unveil any probable inequality and dispersion among the elements of interest. Table 1 is the summary descriptive statistics of the entire variables applied in the CGWSI, and the means and standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test responses of each element on the CGWSI rating scale.

In Table 1, the mean of the pre-test for the *evidence ethics* item within the *importance* category ($M = 3.7, SD = .548$), for example, appeared inferior to the mean of the post-test for the *evidence ethics* item within the same *importance* category ($M = 3.9, SD = .348$), indicating a difference in means between the pre-test and post-test indicators. Correspondingly, the mean of the pre-test for the *evidence ethics* item within the *confidence* category ($M = 3.1, SD = .703$), for instance, appeared lower than the mean of the post-test for the *evidence ethics*

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Core Group Work Skills Inventory – Importance and Confidence

Parameter	Importance						Confidence					
	Pre-test			Post-test			Pre-test			Post-test		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Evidences ethics	58	3.7	.54	58	3.9	.34	58	3.1	.70	58	3.3	.627
Evidences best	58	3.6	.58	58	3.8	.43	58	2.7	.76	58	3.1	.672
Evidences diversity	58	3.7	.49	58	3.7	.45	58	2.9	.72	58	3.2	.729
Develops a plan	58	3.7	.56	58	3.8	.39	58	3.1	.77	58	3.5	.567
Seeks good fit	58	3.6	.59	58	3.7	.45	58	2.8	.71	58	3.2	.752
Gives feedback	58	3.6	.53	58	3.7	.48	58	3.0	.73	58	3.2	.650
Requests feedback	58	3.5	.59	58	3.6	.62	58	3.1	.65	58	3.2	.683
Works cooperatively	58	3.6	.56	58	3.7	.47	58	3.1	.76	58	3.1	.826
Identifies group	58	3.7	.51	58	3.7	.47	58	2.8	.82	58	3.2	.720
Works collaboratively	58	3.6	.58	58	3.8	.40	58	3.2	.71	58	3.5	.597
Encourages participation	58	3.6	.58	58	3.8	.40	58	3.2	.63	58	3.5	.600
Responds to group members	58	3.7	.55	58	3.7	.45	58	3.2	.70	58	3.5	.503
Responds to group process	58	3.5	.62	58	3.5	.53	58	2.8	.89	58	3.2	.695
Keeps a group	58	3.7	.51	58	3.6	.48	58	2.7	.76	58	3.9	4.07
Requests information	58	3.3	.59	58	3.5	.62	58	2.9	.69	58	3.3	.598
Requests disclosure	58	3.5	.75	58	3.6	.50	58	2.8	.76	58	3.2	.650
Provides information	58	3.5	.62	58	3.7	.46	58	3.0	.77	58	3.4	.650
Discloses opinions	58	3.1	.71	58	3.2	.76	58	2.8	.73	58	3.1	.712
Assesses group	58	3.5	.56	58	3.6	.52	58	2.8	.75	58	3.2	.596
Identifies personal	58	3.4	.56	58	3.5	.59	58	3.0	.68	58	3.2	.540
Develops hypotheses	58	3.2	.65	58	3.4	.62	58	2.6	.74	58	3.0	.772
Develops overarching	58	3.7	.59	58	3.8	.42	58	2.7	.80	58	3.3	.744
Employs contextual	58	3.5	.56	58	3.7	.47	58	2.5	.75	58	3.0	.772
Conducts evaluation	58	3.5	.59	58	3.6	.49	58	2.9	.81	58	3.2	.720
Engages in self-evaluation	58	3.5	.59	58	3.7	.45	58	3.1	.81	58	3.4	.65
Contributes to evaluation	58	3.3	.68	58	3.5	.53	58	2.7	.74	58	3.8	3.95
Provides self-disclosure	58	3.5	.62	58	3.6	.52	58	2.8	.75	58	3.1	.76

Item within the same *confidence* category ($M = 3.3, SD = .627$), indicating there was a disparity in means between the pre-test and post-test indicators. Table 2 is the Cronbach's alpha test statistic, to resolve the subject of the reliability of the *CGWSI* instrument in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader (Equation 1). Because of the lack of substantial differences among the items on the scale, the application of the unstandardized Cronbach's alpha in Table 2 was important in the explanation of the reliability coefficient of the *CGWSI* design, following an analogous argument by Leech, Barrett, and Morgan (2014). Therefore, in Table 2, the alpha for the 27 items on the rating scale, which collectively determine the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader, was of .94, a suggestion the items confirmed a scale that had applied internal stability reliability for the *CGWSI* design. Consequently, the results in Tables 2 for all 27 items on the *CGWSI* scale together indicated the learners offered advanced assessments of the instructional quality they received to determine them as an effective group members or leaders, and the items created a scale that confirmed substantial internal equivalence reliability. Given this, the *CGWSI* design displayed robust internal reliability.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.937	.966	108

The succeeding segments encompass paired-sample *t*-test explorations, to resolve the issues in Equation (2). There were four hypotheses developed in the examination of Equation (2). Tables 3 and 4 are the results of the hypothesis developed, to examine the possibility of a difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test responses on the selected items in the rating scale for the category of importance for all participants in determining the effectiveness of learners as group members or leaders.

Table 3. Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics for Importance Category (Overall)

		Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PostCGWSII	3.63	27	.14	.02
	PreCGWSII	3.52	27	.16	.03

Table 3 describes the pattern of the pre-test and post-test data for the *importance* category on the *CGWSI* design, using the means and standard deviation, while Table 4 indicates whether the difference in means between the pre-test and post-test are significant. On average, participants engaged in the post-test assessment of the importance of the individual behavioral items on the *CGWSI* in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a Leader showed additional prominence to the behavioral elements on the rating scale ($M = 3.64$, $SD = .15$), than participants in the pre-test assessment ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .17$) for an identical determination. This difference, .11, CI [.09, .14], was significant $t(26) = 9.17$, $p = .000$ and exemplified a very large effect, $r = .87$, following the analysis of Rosenthal (1991). Given this, it is suggested participants gave prominence to the behavioral elements on the *CGWSI* design in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test Results for Importance Category (Overall)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PostCGWSII PreCGWSII	-0.11	0.06	0.01	0.08	0.13	9.17	26	0

Tables 5 and 6 are the results of the hypothesis developed, to examine the possibility of a difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test responses on the degree of confidence participants had on the selected items in the rating scale applied in determining the effectiveness of learners as group members or leaders.

Table 5. Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics for Confidence Category (Overall)

		Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PostCGWSIC	3.29	27	.20	.03
	PreCGWSIC	2.90	27	.18	.03

Table 5 defines the outline of the pre-test and post-test data for the *confidence* category on the *CGWSI* design, applying the means and standard deviation, while Table 6 specifies whether the difference in means between the pre-test and post-test scores are significant. Standardly, participants engaged in the post-test evaluation of the degree of confidence held on the individual behavioral items on the *CGWSI* in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader displayed added confidence on the behavioral items in the rating scale ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .21$), than participants in the pre-test assessment ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .18$) for an identical determination. This difference, .39, CI [.30, .49], was significant $t(26) = 8.77$, $p = .000$ and typified a very large effect, $r = .86$, following the analysis of Rosenthal (1991). Given this, it is suggested participants had confidence on the behavioral elements in the *CGWSI* design, in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders.

Table 6. Paired Samples Test Results for Confidence Category (Overall)

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PostCGWSIC PreCGWSIC	-.39	.23	.04	.30	.48	8.77	26	.000

Tables 7 and 8 are the results of the hypothesis advanced to investigate the possibility of a difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test responses of Black/African American participants on how significant were the selected items in the rating scale applied to determine the effectiveness of learners as group members or leaders. Table 7 describes the

pattern of the pre-test and post-test data for the *importance* category on the *CGWSI* design, using the means and standard deviation, while Table 8 indicates whether the difference in means between the pre-test and post-test scores are significant. On average, Black/African Americans involved in the post-test assessment of the importance of the individual behavioral items on the *CGWSI* in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader showed added prominence to the behavioral items on the rating scale ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .14$), than participants in the pre-test assessment ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .12$) for an identical determination. This difference, .15, CI [.11, .19], was significant $t(26) = 7.93$, $p = .000$ and demonstrated a very large effect, $r = .84$, following the analysis of Rosenthal (1991). Therefore, it is suggested Black/African American participants gave eminence to the behavioral items on the *CGWSI* design in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders.

Table 7. Paired Samples Descriptive Statistics for Importance Category – Black/African American

		Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PostCGWSII	3.66	27	.14	.02
	PreCGWSII	3.51	27	.11	.02

Table 8. Paired Samples Test Results for Importance Category – Black/African American

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PostCGWSII - PreCGWSII	-.15	.09	.01	.11	.18	7.93	26	.000

Tables 9 and 10 are the results of the hypothesis developed, to investigate the likelihood of a difference between the means of the pre-test and post-test responses on the degree of confidence Black/African American participants had on the designated items in the rating scale applied in determining the effectiveness of learners as group members or leaders. Table 9 describes the summary of the pre-test and post-test data for the *confidence* category on the *CGWSI* design, applying the means and standard deviation, while Table 10 stipulates whether the difference in means between the pre-test and post-test scores are significant.

Table 10. Paired Samples Test Results for Confidence Category – Black/African American

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PostCGWSIC - PreCGWSIC	.35	.27	.05	.24	.46	6.68	26	.000

Standardly, Black/African American participants involved in the post-test assessment of the degree of confidence held on the individual behavioral items on the *CGWSI* in determining the effectiveness of the learner as a group member or a leader revealed added confidence on the behavioral items in the rating scale ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .25$), than participants in the pre-test assessment ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .15$) for an identical determination. This difference, .36, CI [.25, .47], was significant $t(26) = 6.69$, $p = .000$ and epitomized a very large effect, $r = .80$, following the analysis of Rosenthal (1991). Therefore, it is suggested Black/African American participants had confidence on the behavioral elements in the *CGWSI* design, in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders.

Discussion

The present study sought a) to understand and assess AACIT's confidence in their core group counseling skills from the beginning of the course through to completion; b) to demonstrate and understand how important the view of core group counseling skills are; and c) to understand how the pre-post test results of *importance* and *confidence* may impact core group counseling skill development. African-American counselors-in-training and their colleagues were enrolled in a face-to-face or online group counseling course. The pretest *CGWSI-IC* form was completed on the first day of class, and the posttest *CGWSI-IC* form was completed after the students completed their experiential group counseling facilitation. During the semester the counselors-in-training were provided with different group counseling skill building through course assignments such as *Yalom's*, *The Schopenhauer Cure* book analysis, group counseling literature paper, performing group facilitation, testing, and observation of group counseling skills modeled by the instructor (first author).

Results indicated an increase in a mean between pre and posttest for the *evidence ethics* item within the *confidence* category. Whereas, for the *confidence* level for the CIT, there was also a disparity in means between the pre- and posttest in

the *evidence* level. Significance with a very large effect was seen in the importance of individual behavioral items on the *CGWSI-IC* scale.

Overall counselors-in-training had similar results as it related to importance and *confidence* levels. The very large effect of *confidence* levels of the overall CITs may indicate a positive effect of the overall group course, similar to the study by Shera et al. (2013). Although caution should be taken when interpreting these results as some students' scores revealed the obtainment or possession of knowledge, but the *confidence* level may be low because more practice was needed to craft group facilitation skills. Some students in these group counseling courses only had one opportunity to practice their experiential group core counseling facilitation skills, so having that lack of *confidence* may be evident as a result of one classroom-based group facilitation experience. However, knowing how important these core group counseling skills are for their counseling careers, it showed in the significance of the results. Even though CITs before completing the group counseling course informally indicated they believed individual counseling was more important than group counseling, research suggests otherwise. Loesch and Vacc (1988) indicated students focus most of their attention on individual and group counseling and perform better in these areas on the National Counselor Examinations (NCE). This research was furthered in the present study's finding with participating CITs showing a positive effect of the *importance* of group counseling skills.

Wilson and Newmeyer (2008) showed different results from the present study, which indicated the *importance* level for group counseling skills for master's students in counseling education increased from the pre- to the posttest. However, the master's prepared clinicians in the Wilson and Newmeyer (2008) study core group work skills *importance* level decreased from pre- to posttest. It is noteworthy the first author and group counseling instructor for the past four years found through informal surveys, students noted their negative thoughts toward group counseling have changed to a positive one as a result of their group facilitation experiences.

AACIT in the present study had similar results as their counterparts with an overall significant effect for *importance* and *confidence* levels in a group counseling class. African Americans' *confidence* level pre- and post the group counseling experience as a group leader indicated a significance with a very large effect. Similar to the *importance* level, the *confidence* level of the African Americans revealed a significant difference also with a very large effect. These results suggest African American counselors-in-training had *confidence* in their group counseling skills and felt knowing the group counseling core skills was very *important*. Results indicated an increase in mean between pre and posttest for the *evidence ethics* item within the *confidence* category. Carr, Koyama, and Thiagarajan (2003) as the present study noted the importance of ethics in group counseling. This study noted that international group facilitators like minority African American group facilitators indicated the importance of ethical guidelines in group sessions.

Contrary to other studies (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013), African Americans experienced feelings of self-doubt in their counseling abilities, but the present study found this minority group felt *confidence* in their group counseling core skills. Also, Dames and Barrow (2017) study indicated 54% of African American counselors-in-training, noted being confident in group counseling skills that were developed and linked to form the core category: *empathy*. Being *empathic* was noted as one of the recurring themes. *Empathy* allows these counselors in training to feel comfortable and has a perceived connection with other group members (Dames & Barrow, 2017). This *empathy* may allow them to feel confident with using the group core counseling work skills. Although the African American counselor-in-training *confidence* and *importance* levels in their group core work skills were statistically significant in this present study, more needs to be done to assist not only in group counseling experience but also using their empathy quality to improve their confidence level.

Research suggests the application of multicultural training in group facilitation for African American counselors-in-training is lacking. A suggested first step to address this gap in counselor education programs would be to acknowledge the challenges that are faced by African American counselors-in-training. However, if a program does not make an active effort to include and treat such students equitably, this understanding is rendered unproductive (Baker & Moore, 2015; Henfield et al., 2013). To include African American students, counselor education programs need to be proactive in the recruitment and retention of African American faculty in addition to growing a more diverse student population. To substantiate this, results in the present study also indicated the *evidence diversity* parameter (meaning diversity dynamics seen in the group process) revealed an increase in the *confidence* level of group counseling core skills. Whereas no change was noted with how *important* these group counseling skills were with the *evidence diversity* from pre- to posttest (Table 2). To maintain confidence levels in group counseling skills of African American students, the first author is of black descent (not African American) and has been teaching group counseling solely for the past five years at the present study's university. Therefore, this faculty member can provide additional insight and mentorship for Black/African American students (Henfield et al., 2013).

Baker and Moore (2015) suggest incorporating cultural considerations into course content for all courses as well as the whole program. Incorporating such considerations would, at the very least involve an understanding and awareness of cultural considerations on the part of faculty and students. CACREP (2015) incorporated cultural competence into the foundation of CACREP Accredited program's curriculum. This competency area includes topics such as characteristics of diverse groups, multicultural theories and techniques, multicultural competencies, how the person's view of the world and others have been influenced by heritage, attitudes, beliefs, religion or spirituality, and understandings, effects of power and

privilege, and eliminating barriers and prejudices (CACREP, 2015). The present study's university is both an HBCU and a CACREP-accredited program. Therefore, African American counselors in training benefited from being trained in this program because perhaps some factors experienced by African American students' experience at another university (i.e., specifically, predominantly white institutions) were eliminated. African American students made up the majority of students in the group class. Therefore, this ethnicity make-up can help boost their confidence and skill levels. Also, as noted before, the instructor for the group course is of black descent, and the counseling program at this HBCU is made up of sixty-three percent African American faculty members (seven of eleven). This indicates the importance of diversity recruitment in counseling programs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the confidence and important levels of AACIT for the core group counseling skills. Results suggest African American participants had confidence in determining their effectiveness as group members or leaders. Future research may examine other variables more carefully, such as developing a plan for group, self-disclosure, and self-evaluations used in the present study. Also, reviewing the difference in confidence and importance levels among their colleagues from a different ethnic group (e.g., White or Asian). It may also be interesting to review how AACITs' experience in their confidence and importance levels of core group counseling skills are impacted after conducting more than one group facilitation.

Suggestions

Implications for CIT and, more specifically, for African American CITs and core group counseling skills can be highlighted. The finding of significance for *confidence and importance* levels of core group counseling skills of African Americans can improve their training in group counseling skills. Wilson and Newmeyer (2007) stated: "...individuals who value and feel confident in their ability to perform training objectives may not be interested in further training or may seek advanced training to improve skills..." (p. 6). Therefore, the presence of colored professors can help with diversity and cultural presence and also aid counselors-of-color identity with someone similar to their race and identity. Also, Wilson and Newmeyer noted there should include an application of training for all group counselors-in-trainings. African Americans will also need to be trained more in group counseling to improve their confidence and perceptions of group counseling skills. This is deemed important for all counselor educators. However, African American counseling students are encouraged after graduation to not only conduct group counseling in their settings but also to participate in professional development to continue to improve their *confidence* level and to continue to perceive *importance* for core group counseling skills.

Recommendations

Future studies may be conducted on African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWI) to examine differences in ethics and importance of core group counseling skills in different educational settings.

Limitations

Limitations are present in any research done, and this study is no exception. CACREP mandates that counseling students experience 10 group counseling hours over a semester (CACREP, 2015). Therefore, the present study's university has mandated a course cap of 15 students. This was done to ensure the instructor provides full attention and effective feedback to the CIT while they facilitate or participate in group facilitation. Not all universities adhere to a small enrollment cap.

The present study had 68 participants in one of five group counseling courses surveyed. Despite the low numbers for this study, there was a significant difference between the African American's confidence and importance levels as it pertains to core group counseling skills. Therefore, African American students, despite their historical oppression, still felt as confident about their core group counseling skills as their non-African American colleagues.

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Appendix A

Core Group Work Skills Inventory-Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC)

Core Group Work Skills Inventory—Importance and Confidence (CGWSI-IC)				
F. Robert Wilson, Mark D. Newmeyer, Lynn S. Rapin, and Robert K. Conyne				
Instructions: The CGWSI consists of 27 items. Each item describes a behavior that may or may not be useful to being effective as a group member or group leader. Please rate the importance of each item and your confidence in being able to do what the item describes by circling the number that represents your rating.				
	Importance		Confidence	
	1: Very unimportant		1: Very unconfident	
	2: Unimportant		2: Unconfident	
	3: Important		3: Confident	
	4: Very important		4: Very confident	
1. Evidences ethical practice in group membership or leadership	1	2	3	4
2. Evidences best practices in group membership or leadership	1	2	3	4
3. Evidences diversity competent practice in group membership or leadership	1	2	3	4
4. Develops a plan for group leadership activities	1	2	3	4
5. Seeks good fit between group plans and group member's life context	1	2	3	4
6. Gives feedback to group members	1	2	3	4
7. Requests feedback from group members	1	2	3	4
8. Works cooperatively with a co-leader	1	2	3	4
9. Identifies group process	1	2	3	4
10. Works collaboratively with group members	1	2	3	4
11. Encourages participation of group members	1	2	3	4
12. Responds empathically to group member behavior	1	2	3	4
13. Responds empathically to group process themes	1	2	3	4
14. Keeps a group on task	1	2	3	4
15. Requests information from group members	1	2	3	4
16. Requests disclosure of opinions and feelings from group members	1	2	3	4
17. Provides information to group members	1	2	3	4
18. Discloses opinions and feelings to group members	1	2	3	4
19. Assesses group functioning	1	2	3	4
20. Identifies personal characteristics of individual members of the group	1	2	3	4
21. Develops hypotheses about the behavior of group members	1	2	3	4
22. Develops overarching purpose and sets goals/objectives for the group, as well as methods for determining outcomes	1	2	3	4
23. Employs contextual factors in interpreting individual and group behavior	1	2	3	4
24. Conducts evaluation of one's leadership style	1	2	3	4
25. Engages in self-evaluation of personally selected performance goals	1	2	3	4
26. Contributes to evaluation activities during group processing	1	2	3	4
27. Provides appropriate self-disclosure	1	2	3	4

FIGURE 2.3 A Reproduction of the Core Group Work Skills Inventory—Importance and Confidence.

Source: CGWSI-IC: Copyright © 2007 by F. Robert Wilson, Mark D. Newmeyer, Lynn S. Rapin, and Robert K. Conyne, University of Cincinnati.

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