

RACIAL/CULTURAL IDENTITY:  
TRANSFORMATION AMONG SCHOOL-BASED  
MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS WORKING  
IN NUNAVUT

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Eight non-Aboriginal school counselors, who temporarily lived in Nunavut to provide services to Inuit clients, were interviewed regarding changes in their sense of self and their racial/cultural identity as a result of cross-cultural immersion. They were also engaged in an arts-based exercise where they pictorially represented perceived self-changes. Analysis of counsellors' narratives of their experiences in Nunavut and their art work revealed an increasing awareness of their "Whiteness" and their participation in the colonizing culture. The counsellors also displayed changes in cultural worldview that directly paralleled the socio-centric and eco-centric nature of the Inuit culture, precipitating culturally sensitive counselling practice.

Key words: racial/cultural identity; whiteness; Aboriginal; school counselling; multicultural competence

Huit conseillers pédagogiques non autochtones temporairement en poste au Nunavut pour fournir des services à une clientèle inuite ont été interviewés au sujet de l'évolution de leur perception de leur identité personnelle et raciale/culturelle à la suite de leur immersion dans une autre culture. Ces conseillers ont également participé à un exercice créatif dans le cadre duquel ils devaient représenter en images les changements qu'ils avaient perçus chez eux. L'analyse des propos de ces conseillers au sujet de leurs expériences au Nunavut et de leurs créations ont révélé une conscientisation accrue de leur appartenance à la race blanche et de leur participation à une culture colonisatrice. Les auteurs notent également que la vision du monde de ces conseillers pédagogiques a changé et ce, en lien direct avec la nature sociocentrique et écocentrique de la culture inuite, ce qui a favorisé une prestation de services tenant compte des différences culturelles.

Mots clés : identité raciale/culturelle, race blanche, autochtones, conseiller pédagogique, compétence multiculturelle

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Aboriginal people represent one of Canada's fastest growing cultural communities (Statistics Canada, 2003, 2004). This group consists of the Inuit people of Nunavut, First Nations communities, and the Metis (Assembly of First Nations, 1994). As the original inhabitants of Canada who were subject to colonization and decades of government policies aimed at forced assimilation, Aboriginal people continue to experience widespread racism and discrimination and are recognized as the country's most disadvantaged group (Waldram, 1997). In the history of Canadian society, residential schools served as one of the vehicles for assimilation of Aboriginal people into Canadian culture by forcibly separating children from their parents and Elders (Assembly of First Nations). According to Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, (IRSRC, 2006), a federal government agency handling residential school abuse claims from Inuit and First Nations people, children who attended these schools were punished for speaking their own language and for practising their culture or spirituality. Many children were also verbally, physically, and sexually abused. Today, many Aboriginal people and communities experience a multitude of problems associated with the intergenerational trauma of residential schools. These include chronic poverty, family breakdown, low academic achievement, depression,

anxiety, and high suicide rates (Anawak, 2000; Korhonen, 2002; Waldram, 1997).

In recent years, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people have relocated to urban environments where they have the opportunity to economically, socially, and culturally integrate (Statistics Canada, 2004). As a result, Aboriginal students have a significant presence in contemporary Canadian schools and are integrating in post-secondary institutions (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004). The influx of Aboriginal students into urban Canadian school environments recreates the historic situation where they are in an educational system led by members of the dominant group in society. To correct the injustices of the past and respect the culture and history of Aboriginal youth enrolled in mainstream schools, educational professionals need to develop competence in working cross-culturally (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997; Gosine, 2002).

Holcomb-McCoy (2004, 2005) postulates that multicultural competence involves three components: (a) an awareness of one's own racial and cultural heritage and how it has impacted one's personal experiences, (b) knowledge of the history, culture, and norms of diverse student groups, and (c) the ability to deliver educational and mental health related interventions that are congruent with the cultures and worldviews of diverse students. The need for teachers to be sensitive to racial/cultural issues is well recognized (Gosine, 2002; Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003), limited attention has been paid to the need for school and university-based counsellors and psychologists to develop multicultural competence (Wallace, 2000). School counsellors and school psychologists play a central role in conducting intellectual assessments that may affect educational placement decisions, as well as in responding to students' academic problems, interpersonal problems, or mental health needs (Holcomb-McCoy).

When school/university mental health professionals lack competence in working cross-culturally, culturally diverse children and families may receive inadequate services (Constantine, 2001; Rogers et al., 1999; Schwallie-Giddis, Anstrom, Sanchez, Sardi & Granato, 2004). Existing research suggests that misunderstandings of Aboriginal ways of thinking and communicating may play a role in the overrepresentation

of Aboriginal children in special education classes (Myles & Harold, 1988). Also, it is possible that Aboriginal students' experiences of racism and discrimination could be trivialized if counsellors from the dominant group do not become cognizant of their privileged racial status. In light of the prevalence of mental health concerns emerging from intergenerational trauma within the Aboriginal community (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Waldram, 1997), it is imperative that school-based mental health professionals develop the self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, and culturally sensitive intervention skills to effectively meet the unique needs of Aboriginal students.

Despite the acknowledged importance of multicultural competence, Canadian educational professionals appear to be lacking expertise in this area. Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) conducted a large-scale study of the multicultural training experiences and competencies of counsellors affiliated with the Canadian Counselling Association (CCA), is the main national professional association to which school counsellors belong. The majority of the respondents (approximately 79 per cent) identified themselves as members of the dominant group (White or European Canadians). The results suggested that only one-third of counsellors who had been practising for ten years or more had taken at least one course or supervised practicum in multicultural counselling. The counsellors' responses to a self-report instrument assessing their racial/cultural awareness, knowledge of diverse groups, and culturally-sensitive intervention strategies suggested low levels of multicultural competence (Arthur & Januszkowski, 2001). Brooks, Mintz, and Dobson (2004) obtained similar results in a study of diversity education in Canadian training programs for school and community psychologists.

A very interesting emerging finding in the Arthur and Januszkowski (2001) research was that greater levels of multicultural competence were related to higher levels of exposure to cultural diversity in the counsellors' student caseloads. Consistent with this finding, Helms (1990, 1995) identified cross-cultural contact as a key factor in precipitating White Racial Identity Development. Helms' model of White Racial Identity Development (WRID) is widely cited in the educational literature (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). For example, Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) used this model to explore WRID in pre-service teachers

during placements in multicultural/multiracial classrooms. According to the model, WRID progresses through a sequence of identity statuses. In the initial Contact status, people are exposed to cultural and racial differences. The cross-cultural contact leads into the Disintegration status, when this exposure prompts confusion and anxiety about the meaning or implications of one's racial and cultural heritage. This status may then be followed by Reintegration, characterized by feelings of superiority of one's own racial group or Pseudo-independence, characterized by superficial tolerance of other groups. A period of search to recognize White privilege and to redefine a White identity is characteristic of the Immersion/Emersion status. The Autonomy status involves the White person moving beyond racial self-knowledge and knowledge of other groups to make a conscious commitment to anti-racist behaviour and practice (Helms, 1990, 1995). Helms' model suggests that similar to teachers working in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, school-based mental health professionals may experience racial identity transformations based on the nature of their interactions with the diverse students they serve.

McAllister and Irvine (2000) reviewed a variety of research studies exploring the relationship between racial/cultural identity development and cross-cultural competence in educational professionals (teachers and mental health professionals). Their review showed that higher levels of cultural/racial identity development are consistently associated with higher levels of multicultural competence, non-racist behaviour, and knowledge about other cultures and races. Although several authors make note of the importance of cross-cultural contact for identity development and multicultural competence (Gopaul-McNicol, 1997; Neville, Heppner, Louie, Thompson, Brooks, & Baker, 1996; Ottavi, Pope-Davis & Dings, 1994; Ponterotto, Alexander, & Grieger, 1995; Sue & Sue, 2003), no study has ascertained how such contact advances the racial/cultural identity status and competence of counsellors working in Canadian schools. Although the concepts of White Identity and White privilege have been discussed extensively in the United States (McIntosh, 1990), Canada's focus on multiculturalism has tended to create a colour-blind approach to issues of race (Dupre, 2006; Lindo, 2006). This is despite the significance of racial and cultural identity in both teacher-

student and counsellor-student interactions in the Canadian educational system (Shick, 2000; Solomon, Potelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005).

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the experiences of school/university counsellors of Western European or Canadian heritage who temporarily relocated to Nunavut to work with Inuit students. The research had two primary objectives: (a) to examine perceived changes in counsellors' sense of self or racial/cultural identity as a result of cross-cultural immersion, and (b) to uncover specific experiences or critical incidents that prompted these changes. Counsellors' relocation to Canada's far north would change their status from dominant group members in southern Canada to racial/cultural minorities in Nunavut, an experience which could lead to increased awareness of Whiteness (Harper, 2002; Wihak, 2004). Furthermore, as members of the colonizing culture, the counsellors would be placed in a situation where their racial/cultural identity would have historical significance for the Inuit students they work with, increasing its salience and relevance to their practice.

Nunavut consists of small, close-knit communities, ranging in size approximately 25 to 6500 people. The population of Nunavut is 85 per cent Inuit, with Inuktitut as their first language (Government of Nunavut, 2004). Colonization in the Arctic region created a plethora of social problems in Inuit communities (e.g. family violence, poor academic achievement, mental health concerns), similar to those of other Canadian Aboriginal groups (Korhonen, 2002). Mental health professionals working in educational settings in Nunavut address these issues in the lives of children, parents, and communities. In their work, they are challenged by the unique cultural worldview of the Inuit. Wenzel (1991) describes the cultural identity and worldview of the Inuit as both socio-centric or community centered, and eco-centric, where human beings, animals, and the natural environment (land) form "a single cognitive community" (p.140). Counsellors' experiences working with Inuit clients would inform the process of training school-based mental health professionals to develop competence in working with other Canadian Aboriginal groups.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

*Sampling approach and criteria.* Participants were selected through snowball sampling from the first author's existing professional network (Patton, 2002). This author had relocated to Nunavut for 10 years to work in educational and counselling roles with Inuit students. Only counsellors who did not have an ongoing working relationship with the researcher were recruited for involvement in the present study. There were three criteria for study participation: a) the counsellors were born and raised in Canada, were of Western European or Canadian origin, and were native English speakers; b) they were employed in educational settings in Nunavut for a minimum of two years; and c) they had returned to southern Canada for a minimum of one year before this study began.

The first criterion ensured that the participants would experience a change in status to becoming both a visible and linguistic minority when they relocated to Nunavut, creating heightened racial/cultural consciousness. The second criterion was based on previous research that identified two years of cross-cultural immersion as a prerequisite for significant intercultural understanding and related personal identity change (Bennett, 1986). The third criterion was derived from Schild-Jones' (1999) finding that sojourners need time to reflect on their cross-cultural immersion experiences after they return home to discover their significance and personal impact.

*Participants' background and experiences.* Eight female counsellors participated in this research. Information about the counsellors' backgrounds, professional roles in Nunavut schools and post-secondary institutions, and the duration of their sojourns is presented below. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants are used in the place of their real names. Demographic information such as participants' ages and the specific years during which they lived in Nunavut is excluded from the descriptions to prevent identification.

Bev spent 19 years in Nunavut working as a school guidance counsellor and then as the director of a community counselling agency. She had worked with Inuit people living in Ottawa prior to her sojourn.

While in Nunavut, Bev married an Inuit man and learned to speak Inuktitut. At the time of the study, Bev had been back in southern Canada for a period of one year, continuing her work in the mental health sector.

Meeka, a guidance counsellor and experienced multicultural educator, spent 10 years in Nunavut directing a life skills program for Inuit youth, and providing services in a community school to children with behaviour disorders. Meeka returned to southern Canada seven years before this study took place. Upon her return, she continued to provide counselling services to Aboriginal youth.

Debbie, a graduate level social worker (MSW) with previous experience working with Aboriginal bands in Alberta, spent seven years living in Nunavut involved in both direct counselling and counsellor training in a college Social Work program. At the time of the study, it had been six years since she had returned to southern Canada to teach multicultural counselling in a community college.

Deborah, a criminologist who had participated in numerous foreign aid programs, spent six years involved in counselling and counsellor training in a college setting in Nunavut. She had been back in southern Canada for nine years at the time of this study, pursuing work in international and intercultural education.

Fluff, a psychiatric social worker (MSW), lived in Nunavut for four years as a Mental Health Specialist, which involved work with teachers, parents and school children. Her previous cross-cultural experience included working with Aboriginal bands in several provinces. She returned to southern Canada 10 years before this study took place and continued to work with Aboriginal communities.

Pat, a graduate level social worker (MSW), had worked with the Mi'qmaq people in Nova Scotia prior to relocating to Nunavut for four years to coordinate a Community Wellness Program, which involved extensive work in schools. She had returned to southern Canada one year before this study took place, but returned to Nunavut periodically to work with Inuit men who had been sexually abused as children by a non-Inuit teacher.

Danya, a doctoral level psychologist, lived in Nunavut for two years to work as a counsellor at a community college. This was her first cross-



cultural counselling experience. She had been back in southern Canada for seven years at the time of the study, working with immigrant students as a university counsellor.

Rebecca, a social worker (BSW) with previous cross-cultural experience teaching English in South America, spent two years working in Nunavut. Her generic community counsellor position involved work with adult students at the local community college. She returned to southern Canada two years prior to the time of this study to pursue a career in the mental health sector.

#### *Interview and Arts-Based Data Collection*

The first author conducted individual interviews with the counsellor participants about their experiences of living in Nunavut and working in a counselling role with Inuit clients. The specific focus of the interviews was on participants' perceived changes in their sense of self or racial/cultural identity as a result of cross-cultural immersion. The interviews lasted from one to three hours, and took place at a time and location convenient for each participant.

To deeply explore participants' perceived self-changes, each interview began with an arts-based exercise adapted from the work of Norris (1995) and Betensky (2001). Each participant was first asked to write/draw her chosen pseudonym on an index card in such a way that the shape, colour, size, placement, and detailing of the letters in the name reflected a picture of herself before going to Nunavut. Each participant was then asked to write/draw her pseudonym in a way that reflected how she saw herself at the present time on another index card. The participants were subsequently invited to narrate each name drawing, comparing and contrasting the two self-expressions or reflections. The interview continued with a dialogue about how participants' sense of self and their racial/cultural identities were affected by their experiences in Nunavut, and about the specific experiences that prompted any identity change.

Three participants introduced their own variations to the arts-based exercise. Bev chose to do a series of drawings spanning from the beginning of her 19-year sojourn to a year after she left Nunavut. Danya drew three names: *Before*, *Immediately After*, and *Now*. Debbie provided a

word picture rather than a drawing, indicating that she felt her artistic skill was not sufficient to convey the personal meaning of her sojourn. Rebecca declined to participate in this exercise, providing instead a narrative of her Nunavut experience and responding to direct questions related to identity change.

Participants' narrations of their name drawings and study interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the principal researcher or a trained transcriber. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant for review. During a scheduled follow-up interview to seek clarification about drawing narrations or additional information about salient ideas emerging from the initial interview, each participant was given the opportunity to add, delete, or change material in her transcript. With the participants' permission, review interviews were also audio-taped and transcribed, and relevant comments were included in the data analysis.

#### *Data Analysis*

Participants' narrations of their name drawings were analyzed in conjunction with related information in their interview disclosures. Based on the transcripts of the drawing narrations and interviews for each participant, a chronological narrative of the sojourning experience was constructed for each counsellor. Polkinghorne (1995) describes a narrative as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, where specific events or actions are described in their original context within an embedded plot. The sequencing of narratives for this study included counsellors' reasons for moving to Nunavut, the adjustments they were faced with upon arriving in Nunavut, the cultural and racial consciousness-raising experiences prompted by cross-cultural contact, self and racial/cultural identity changes arising out of these experiences, and participants' exit experiences. The audit trail (Merriam, 2002) from the raw transcript to the stories is easily traceable. The narratives were sent to the participants by mail for review and/or modification, and were discussed in a follow-up phone call. Participants' confirmed that the narratives accurately reflected their sojourning experiences.

Polkinghorne's (1995) method of analysis of narratives was used to identify shared experiences that prompted identity or self-change among

the counsellors, and common types of resulting changes that were demonstrated in the name drawings. In contrast to predefined coding systems for examining qualitative data, Polkinghorne's method is a data-driven analysis process, which allowed participants' narrations of their drawings and the meanings they attributed to the self-changes they described to be categorized into themes consistent with their own interpretations. Analysis of narratives was a two-step process: (a) initially, salient themes related to self-change were identified within each participant's chronological narrative, and (b) there was a search for congruities in themes and related exemplars across participants (Polkinghorne). Using this analysis process, various aspects of participants' drawings were used to exemplify the specific types of identity changes that they suggested the drawings represented in their narratives, precluding alternative explanations that might be inconsistent with participants' self-appraisals. The following section describes the key self-changes emerging from counsellors' sojourns in Nunavut, and the cross-cultural immersion experiences that precipitated them.

#### EMERGING THEMES

Analysis of participants' interview responses and name drawings identified four themes: (a) increased White racial consciousness, (b) feeling unity with nature, (c) cultural shifts in worldview, and (d) recognizing universal human connections. Excerpts from participants' interview disclosures are used to elucidate emerging themes. Name drawings are shown as exemplars of specific types of personal transformation.

##### *Increased White Racial Consciousness*

The counsellors explained that the experience of relocating to Nunavut sensitized them to their Whiteness. They communicated a newfound awareness of their status as members of the dominant group in Canadian society that historically victimized and colonized the Inuit. The increased complexity of their post-Nunavut name drawings and changes in color reflected changes in their racial identities as a result of their sojourns.

Pat described her experience living and working in a small community, which was over 90 per cent Inuit. "It was really one of the first times that I was ever a minority....It was an uncomfortable feeling, getting off that plane and looking down and thinking 'Oooh, I'm being examined and stared at'. It was really strange." Rebecca elaborated "When you're part of the majority culture...you're just normal....Being in a place where you are a minority forces you to realize, 'Hey...I have a culture too'. Especially when you are being told how many times a day that you are *qablunaaq* (Inuktitut word for White)!" Rebecca highlighted, if she were describing herself, "I'm White would not be at the top of my list." According to Fluff, the discomfort associated with this racial awareness is due to the fact that "it's a difficult thing to identify as being of a race and culture that is oppressive to a lot of the world, and to recognize that...one's culture exercises power in negative ways over other people." In response, many participants expressed mixed feelings about being White. Rebecca's feelings ranged from "feeling very guilty to feeling kind of defensive." She sometimes felt that what had happened to the Inuit was not her fault. "What's happened, happened and I didn't do it."

Many of the participants attributed changes in their use of color in their pre- and post-Nunavut name drawings to increasing awareness of cultural diversity and of their own racial distinctiveness. Pat's name drawings exemplify this trend (see Figure 1). Pat's After Nunavut drawing shows the use of more vibrant colors to display her name, in contrast to the simple lines and somber colours of her initial drawing. She also added additional color and shading to the middle letter of her name (*a*) in the second drawing, making it stand out. In her narration of her post-Nunavut drawing, she stated "I became a little more colourful because I allowed myself to be different and to accept that."



Figure 1. Pat's Before and After Nunavut Name Drawing

#### *Feeling Unity with Nature*

Besides heightened racial self-consciousness, the counsellors showed a heightened awareness of the natural environment and their connection to the land as a result of their sojourns to Nunavut. Most of the participants' post-Nunavut name drawings reflected this change through the depiction of various aspects of nature that were not emphasized in their initial drawings, such as trees, grass, the sun, and clouds.

Through their work with Inuit students, the counsellors learned that "the Inuit people have a spiritual connection to the Land" (Fluff). Fluff elaborated "...when they were out on the Land, when they were overburdened with worries and fears, they could *see* them (spiritual sources of help and problem solutions, such as ancestors)." Danya expanded on this idea by describing clients' perceptions that when out on the land, animals could also offer them emotional assistance. She described a situation where a group of caribou surrounded one of her highly distressed clients while they were having a counselling session out on the tundra. Although she was initially very frightened by this occurrence, she spoke about the insight she gained into the Inuit worldview when the client assured her that they "just came really to

support her.” Danya described the encounter with the caribou as a “changing-of-boundaries experience,” leading her to enter into a relationship with the natural environment rather than just with other human beings.

Deborah noted that the land and its various life forms like trees, plants, and animals were linked to culturally shared “alternate versions of reality” among the Inuit (e.g. visions of spiritual help). The participants expressed that their physical relocation to the Arctic helped them to appreciate this spiritual affinity for the natural environment. Deborah explained:

You get a sense of just how small you are when you stand at the top of the world and you can see nothing but horizon all around you...That had a profound spiritual impact that emphasized to me...our place in the world, and...the importance of treading gently on the earth and dealing gently with people. (Debrah)

Bev’s name drawings and narrations highlight changes in the counsellors’ self-construals related to heightened environmental consciousness (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). In her Before Nunavut name drawing, she embedded the letters of her name in straight lines and small curves/spirals, explaining “I myself am always represented by a straight line. And then whatever is added on the side shows what I am.” The picture shows her name as disconnected from surrounding parts of the picture, such as the little “igloo” down below. Describing her After Nunavut name drawing, Bev stated: “This has changed me immensely, culturally...I have my roots down deep into the earth and the water and arms reaching up to the sky. I know the land intimately in a way that you can never know the land down here.”

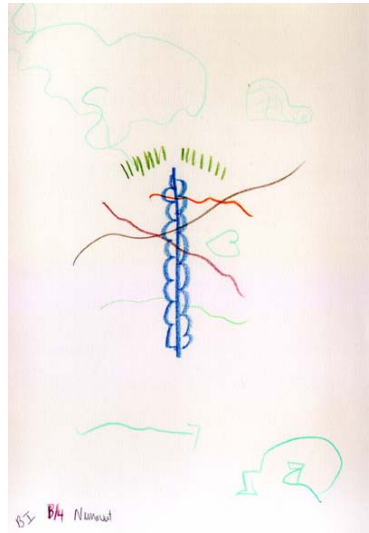


Figure 2. Bev's Before Nunavut Drawing



Figure 3. Bev's After Nunavut Drawing

*Cultural Shifts in Worldview*

The self-changes experienced by the counsellors moved beyond the level of racial and environmental consciousness. Participants' interview disclosures suggested that their experiences working with Inuit students and families within their Indigenous cultural context prompted dramatic shifts in the way they understood the world and a client presenting problems. They reported a cognitive shift from a linear way of thinking to the circular framework of the Inuit people. This cognitive cultural change was evident from the rearrangement of letters and their positions in participants' pre- and post-sojourn name drawings.

Debbie described the change she experienced as "a revolution" in her mind. She stated: "My thinking and the way I thought had nothing to do with the people I was involved with...they didn't think the same way I did... It didn't come as a gradual awareness, my brain literally changed." Debbie explained that the nature of the change involved moving away from a "linear framework," where cause and effect for a problem are clear and distinct and personal responsibility for problems is emphasized. She described moving towards a "circular way of thinking," where all people relevant to the problem may have contributed to it and may play a part in its resolution. "It's a matter of including things (teachers, parents etc.) not eliminating things (possible causes of the problem)."

Deborah explained that this type of cultural shift in thinking was prompted by critical incidents where she made mistakes in her selection of counselling strategies or interventions. She described a situation where she mistakenly imposed a linear framework when working with a case of abuse; she encouraged the abused client to get out of the abusive family situation, while failing to acknowledge the need for the abuser and family to receive assistance and intervention. Discussing how the local Inuit women's advisory group responded to her intervention, she shared: "As a body, these six women picked up their chairs and...excluded me completely from the discussion. The women didn't speak to me for a few days. I just didn't exist." Rebecca described similar learning experiences, eventually reaching a point where before meeting with a given client, she would ask herself "What is their family situation



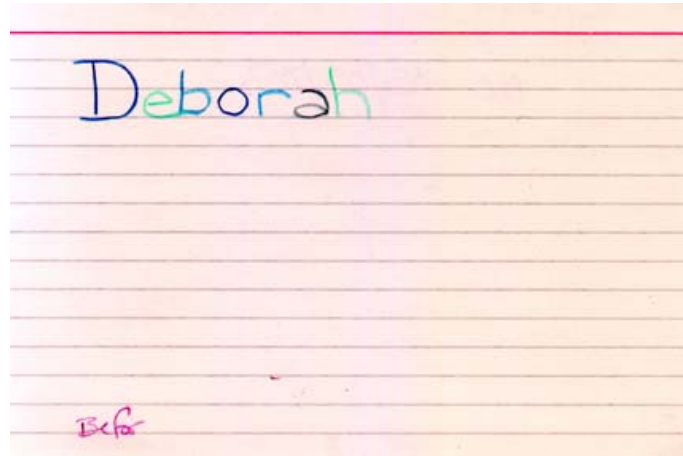
like?...They may be talking about one piece but how that really spills out and relates to how everyone else is doing is what I need to think about.”

Deborah’s name drawings for before she went to Nunavut and after she returned reflects the cognitive restructuring participants described (see Figure 4).

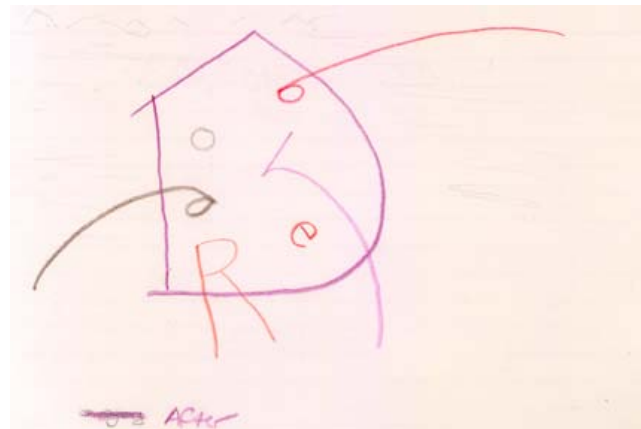
Referring to the simplicity of her Before name drawing and her use of small block letters, she said “I was relatively self-contained and self-assured...and life worked fairly much the way I felt it should.” Explaining her rearrangement of the letters of her name with a mixture of sizes and scripts within a larger letter D, Deborah stated that her experiences in Nunavut “made me see a lot more possibilities and made me realize that the world didn’t work the way I thought it did....it taught me a whole lot of new things about going beyond myself and beyond the borders of what was normal for me.” The extension of the letters of her name outside of the borders of the large D captured the border-crossing she mentioned.

Meeka also expressed similar shifts in her worldview as a result of her Nunavut experiences, and the process of learning from mistakes in working with Inuit students and their families. In her initial name drawing, her name is spelled correctly and the letters are presented on a level plane. However, in her post-Nunavut name drawing, she has misspelled her name and placed some letters higher up and others lower down (see Figure 5). In discussing these changes, Meeka stated:

[In looking at the second picture someone may think] Oh, she spelled her name wrong, but I thought it was very telling....If I knew then what I know now, what different things could I have done? Maybe I take some responsibility [for my mistakes] in some way, so I continue to carry that...but I’m ever changing and evolving. (Meeka)



(a) Before Nunavut



(b) After Nunavut

Figure 4. Deborah's Before and After Nunavut Name Drawings

#### *Recognizing Universal Human Connections*

Despite their heightened awareness of racial and cultural differences, the counsellors expressed that their work with Inuit clients increased their

appreciation of commonalities between people of diverse cultures and the deep connections between them. As Bev observed, "People are people...They have the same feelings. They have the same ideologies. They have the same psychological make-up, basically." Danya echoed Bev when she said, "In so many things, we're the same. We're all humans." Meeka added support to this view when she said, "I learned there's more similarities than differences in people." Pat also reflected "In our most basic forms, we all have the same needs, and we all have the same wants to a different degree. My need for power may be different from yours, and for me power may be knowledge, and for you power may be money, but there's sort of that need to find our place in the world." Summarizing how these ideas were represented in participants' lives when they returned to Southern Canada, Danya stated: "When living in Nunavut, what I had in the South was Canada. Now the rest of Canada has come to me....Canada is so much broader than it was before."

The changes in the participants' pre- and post-Nunavut name drawings illustrated that the recognition of human commonalities seemed to facilitate a feeling of interpersonal connection with the Inuit, a connection that is essential for developing helping relationships across cultures. Fluff's Before and After Nunavut name drawings and narrations exemplify this change (see Figure 6). She initially described herself as "coming in a spirit of openness to where I was going." The separation of letters in her name drawing attests to this self-construal. In contrast, her After Nunavut name drawing connects all the letters of her name with curly lines, symbolizing feelings of "having a lot more interconnection."

## DISCUSSION

The counsellors' name drawings and narratives of their sojourning experiences in Nunavut provided poignant evidence of the racial and cultural transformation that occurred through cross-cultural immersion. The changes in their racial awareness provide support for Helms' (1990, 1995) contention that cross-cultural contact is a prerequisite for White Racial Identity Development. Exposure to cultural differences may provide opportunities for counsellors to learn about divergent cultural



(a) Before Nunavut



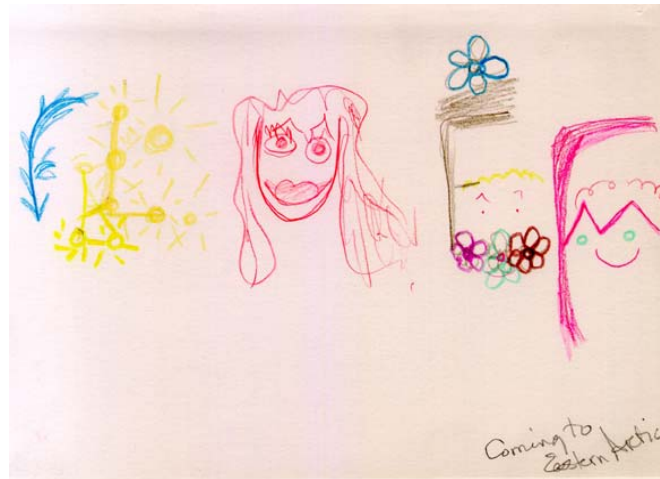
(b) After Nunavut

Figure 5. Meeke's Before and After Nunavut Name Drawings

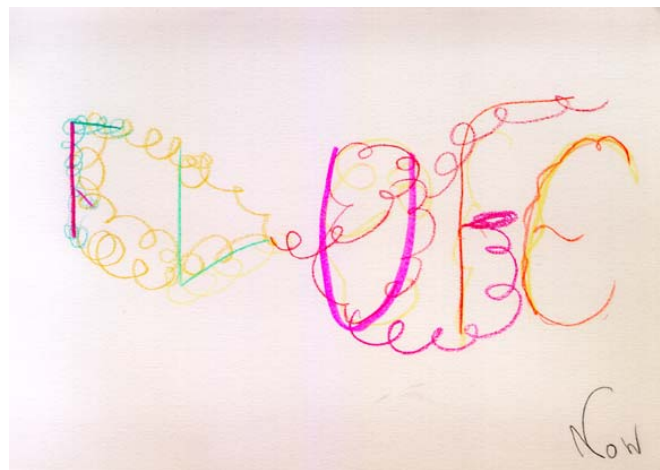
experiences and worldviews through direct work with clients. The role of cross-cultural exposure and cross-cultural learning in the counsellors' experiences is discussed in this section.

Participants described themselves as first becoming aware of being White when they moved to Nunavut and became members of a racial and cultural minority. Reflection about their distinct appearance and cultural norms in contrast to those of the Inuit prompted recognition of their unique cultural heritage. The realization that they were members of the dominant group in Canadian society that played a role in the colonization of the Inuit was described as an emotionally unsettling experience by the counsellors. Their feelings of guilt about being members of the colonizing culture suggested experiences characteristic of the Disintegration status of Helms' WRID model. Teacher participants in another recent study of cross-cultural sojourning also expressed some challenges constructing a positive White identity when confronted with historical information about the oppressive role of the dominant group (Harper, 2002).

Interestingly, participants expressed defensiveness/pride about being White simultaneously with guilty feelings. Rebecca's comments showed her desire to separate herself from the "oppressor" identity, she wasn't directly involved in victimizing the Inuit. Her comments reflected an attempt to assert a positive White identity despite her dominant group status. These reactions attest to some hyper-vigilance regarding matters of race, a characteristic that Helms (1990, 1995) associated with the Immersion/Emersion status of WRID. The counsellors' eventual conclusions about human commonalities and needs despite racial and cultural differences seemed to resemble deep expressions of humanism characteristic of people who reach the Autonomy status in Helms' model and who tend to become advocates for equitable treatment of cultural minorities. Their descriptions of similarities between people of all cultures and appreciation of their realities reflect their development of the universal-diverse orientation that Constantine, Arorash, Barakett, Blackmon, Donnelly, and Edles (2001) argued is essential for effective cross-cultural helping relationships in today's multicultural schools.



(a) Before Nunavut



(b) After Nunavut

*Figure 6. Fluff's Before and After Nunavut Name Drawings*

Although the counsellors showed advanced levels of racial and cultural identity development as a result of their sojourns, they did not appear to move through Helm's (1990, 1995) model in a systematic way. None of the participants made remarks resembling Helms' description of the Reintegration status, in which an individual first begins to question and then accepts White superiority. The counsellor participants appear to have skipped this identity status, illustrating the highly individual and variable nature of racial identity development.

Holcomb-McCoy (2004) and Constantine et al. (2001) argued that a critical aspect of multicultural competence among school and university-based mental health professionals is exploration of one's own racial/cultural identity development. They argued that only when counsellors become aware of their own identity status are they in a position to adequately assess and understand the racial and cultural identities of their student clients, and to take these into account in their intervention planning. Sue and Sue (2003) described scenarios where counsellors with limited racial and cultural identity development encountered students/clients with alternate racial identity statuses. Their work showed that the helping process can be compromised by counsellors' limited racial awareness. When working with students experiencing racism or discrimination in schools, counsellors who do not appreciate the minority experience and who do not recognize their dominant group status may minimize students' experiences or fail to advocate for school anti-racism practices and policies. They may also fail to implement intervention strategies that could assist students to develop positive racial identities, despite negative race-related experiences in the school context.

In terms of intervention strategies, the counsellors in this study highlighted situations in working with Inuit clients where their own cultural worldviews and intervention preferences were initially inconsistent with those of their clients. By receiving corrective and sometimes negative feedback/reactions from clients, they came to recognize this incongruence. Client reactions to their "outsider" perspectives resemble acculturative pressures experienced by missionaries sojourning overseas in Navara and James' (2002) study. These client reactions seemed to serve to reorient the counsellors'

perspectives and behaviours, serving as a vehicle for counsellor acculturation into Inuit culture. The participants in this study shared how they learned from their mistakes in working with Inuit clients to try to plan intervention approaches that were more culturally appropriate.

The process of working with and learning from Inuit clients appeared to precipitate cultural change as well as racial identity transformation among the counsellors. Wenzel's (1991) analysis of Inuit cultural identity is helpful in interpreting participants' disclosures that they had become more connected to Inuit circular ways of thinking and to nature. The participants' post-Nunavut name drawings and their narratives reflected a move towards both increasing socio-centrism and eco-centrism, which are considered key characteristics of Inuit culture. That is, through immersion in an Inuit milieu, the participants had taken on qualities valued in Inuit culture. Participants described a radical cognitive restructuring process that occurred during their counselling interactions with Inuit students. They began to learn to take other family members and community members into account in conceptualizing students' presenting problems and in generating problem solutions. The adoption of the "circular" way of thinking they discussed reflects a shift from an individualistic or independent orientation in the dominant group worldview to the interdependent or collectivist orientation in the Inuit worldview. In Constantine's (2001) view, the change in counsellors' self-construals from independent to interdependent would position them well in contemporary Canadian schools, where Aboriginal students and many immigrant groups espouse collectivist cultural orientations. The circular orientation could encourage counsellors to involve parents and members of the cultural community in their children's education.

The counsellors' narratives and changes in their name drawings also reflected a clear appreciation of the relationship between human beings and the natural environment in the Inuit worldview. They seemed to realize that the land had a special significance for the Inuit (Wenzel, 1991), in connecting them with spiritual sources of assistance, such as the spirits of their ancestors, when they were encountering life difficulties. The changes in counsellors' name drawings suggested that they not only understood the significance of the land for the Inuit, but had developed



their own relationships with the natural environment as a result of their sojourns.

These changes in the counsellors' own cultural identities and experiences would assist them in their cross-cultural work. Holcomb-McCoy (2004) argued that understanding the worldview of culturally-different students is another essential aspect of the multicultural competence of school-based mental health professionals. Appreciating students' worldviews can promote the use of culturally appropriate intervention strategies in counselling. For example, counsellors working with Aboriginal students who appreciate the significance of the Land may hold some of their counselling sessions outside of the office in natural settings, which may have greater healing potential. Sue and Sue (2003) postulated that school-based mental health professionals who work cross-culturally need to be prepared to modify the counselling environment, counselling relationship, and their counselling style to offer culturally sensitive services.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

The findings of this study suggest that the acquisition of more advanced White Racial Identity statuses and appreciation of different cultural worldviews can be facilitated by cross-cultural immersion. It appears that it would be very helpful to supplement formal training in cultural/racial identity development models recommended by Arredondo and Arciniega (1996) and Holcomb-McCoy (2005) with counselling practicum placements in culturally different communities. Sue (2006) postulated that the acquisition of cultural competence in terms of racial self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, and culturally sensitive intervention skills requires both formal course work and the "experiential reality provided by direct contact and service delivery roles within specific cultural communities" (p. 48). Despite this assertion, Arthur and Januszkowski's (2001) study revealed that only a small proportion of counsellors in Canada obtained applied experience working within culturally different communities during the course of their graduate programs. The findings of this study highlight the urgent need for change in counsellor education programs to bridge this gap.

Schick (2000) and Solomon and Levine-Rasky (2003) described encountering resistance from some student teachers around the question of Whiteness when it was addressed in cross-cultural course work. Sue and Sue (2003) also noted experiencing similar reactions when addressing Whiteness with school-based mental health professionals in courses and workshops. Allowing students to experience directly what it feels like to be a minority and to learn about their own racial status through contact with minority group members may promote racial identity development. This could be accomplished through short-term sojourning experiences built into counsellor education. In the Canadian context, this type of sojourn could take place through practicum placements where counsellor trainees live and work in Aboriginal communities.

A formal focus on race and culture could be incorporated into the supervision process in the form of supported reflection during the sojourning experience, and through explicit linkages between race, culture, and intervention strategies. This type of reflection and supervision would ensure that cross-cultural exposure is accompanied by learning on the part of counsellor trainees. Counsellors need to learn how to monitor client reactions to them and to their counselling approach, and how to mirror clients' cultural worldviews in their practice. Because this study suggests that both exposure and learning from clients contribute to racial and cultural identity changes among counsellors that may result in culturally sensitive counselling, both processes should be addressed in immersion experiences.

#### LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study are limited by the small sample size and the long interval between some counsellors' practice in Nunavut and the timing of research interviews. Since the study was retrospective, it was not possible to trace the process of White identity development across time. Longitudinal research of cross-cultural sojourning would deepen our understanding of the identity transformation process. Such research would also assist in identifying which aspects of the sojourning experience were instrumental in supporting or hindering White identity development. A more intensive post-sojourn follow-up would also

allow for an exploration of how White racial identity is affected by returning to a context in which Euro-Canadians form the majority. Given the cultural diversity in Canadian schools, it is essential that educators discover the processes involved in promoting counsellor White racial identity development and multicultural competence.

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