Chapter 73

Multicultural Counseling Competencies:
Why Is It Difficult to Apply What We Know…?

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ABSTRACT

Given the diversity related curriculum requirements of many accrediting bodies in education and the human services to improve service delivery for those who are part of underrepresented groups in the United States, the curriculum requirements efficacy is debatable. Evidence suggest there is a disconnect between the principles of social justice and multicultural counseling competencies and the lack of application of these two principles. This chapter will emphasize these concerns and the reasons why there is such a gap with the application of these two principles using both empirical and anecdotal evidence from past research. Because the terms behavior/action and application seems to be used as synonyms, we will explore the explicit differences in these and other terms. This chapter will also highlight scenarios and give examples of what application looks like and end with recommendations to improve the application of both the multicultural counseling and social justice principles.

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND OF THE MCC

Back in the early 1990s, a group of higher educators, psychologists, and other professionals decided to submit a document to the counseling profession that started what we now know as the Multicultural Counseling Competencies (MCC). Prior to this time, there was no standard on how people who were considered part of the majority group (i.e., European American/White) should work with increasingly diverse populations (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) in the United States. In particular, Division 45 (race/ethnicity) of the American Psychological Association noticed that the profession neglected to outline standards for working with populations considered culturally diverse (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). In 1992, Sue et al. put forth a seminal piece that outlined three levels of MCC: awareness, knowledge and skills. The early 1990s witnessed a change in how underrepresented groups could be assisted by MCC.

It was recently reported that there is a gap between the MCC, social justice principles, and the application of these principles (Ahmed, Wilson, & Henriksen, 2011; Wilson, 2010; Wilson, Pitt, Acklin, & Gines, 2016). In 1996, Arrendondo et al. (1996) updated the MCC to include Explanatory Statements to clarify and contextualize the MCC. More recently, Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough (2016) expanded on the work of both Sue et al. (1992) and Arrendondo et al. (1996) with the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC). Besides other components (e.g., social justice), Ratts and colleagues added another level to the MCC, *action*. While *action* is not *application*, the contributions of Ratts et al. (2016) significantly added to underscoring the importance of the MCC and social justice in everyday practice. While there is an application gap in the MCC and social justice principles, the contributions of Ratts et al. (2016) is noteworthy to moving the needle in how we think about the multicultural counseling and multicultural social justice competencies. Given the history of MCC, the chapter objectives are:

1. To connect the changing demographics in the United States to the need to apply both the multicultural counseling and social justice competencies.
2. To define and understand the multicultural counseling and social justice competencies.
3. To understand how past and present outcomes in higher education and the human services relate to phenotype discrimination in the United States.
4. To be able to apply the multicultural counseling and social justice principles in education and the human services.

Changing Demographics in the United States

The demographic landscape of the United States is rapidly shifting making it truly multicultural in nature. According to the United States Census Bureau (2010a), there are 308.7 million people residing in the United States of which 50.8% are female and 13% are age 65 years and older. The population is expected to grow to 458 million by the year 2050 due in large part to migration. In 2010, individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino accounted for 16% of the population and still today constitutes one of the fastest growing groups in the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Relative to race, European Americans or Whites were estimated to be 72% of the population, Blacks or African Americans were 13%, American Indians and Alaska Natives were 0.9%, Asians were 4.8%, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders were 0.2%, and Other Races (otherwise unspecified) were noted at 6%. Projecting into the year 2060, 1 in 5 individuals will comprise the age group of 65 and older; the Asian and Hispanic/

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