

Chapter 2

Mondays With Mac: An Interpersonal Journey of Cultural Humility

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to “paint a picture of the counseling process” through rich description of how the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC) can be applied through a model and stance of cultural humility, rather than a blanket state of achieving “cultural competence” in cross-cultural counseling. The mission of this chapter to convey the critical nature of accounting for the first author’s (“counselor”) positions of privilege, including positions of racial, age, socioeconomic status, and legal status privileges, over the client (“Mac”), and recognizing how cultural humility needs to be evoked within the counselor in order to apply tenants of the MSJCC as well as the counselor’s interpersonal and relational-cultural approach to counseling and facilitating client growth and healing.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE

A counselor’s ability to provide effective, compassionate care to an intersectionally diverse clientele is of critical importance. Both counselors-in-training (CIT) and professional counselors can often struggle with how to broach topics of difference with their clients. Broaching racial differences between counselor and client is often experienced as particularly difficult. Bringing up and addressing racial differences in the counseling room, particularly for White counselors, may trigger a range of emotions from anxiety to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4507-5.ch002

a concept known as *White fragility* (DiAngelo, 2018). White counselors and CIT may also struggle with addressing broader race-related topics including systemic racism, White supremacy, and the impact of racially-based microaggressions and microassaults on the mental health and overall wellbeing of their clients of color.

While any counselor, regardless of racial identity, may find race a sensitive topic, White counselors in particular can be challenged with effectively assessing, diagnosing, and treating their clients of color in a culturally competent manner. White counselors may also run the risk of perpetuating interpersonal and systemic racism and White supremacy unless they practice with not only cultural competency but race-based competency. The foundation of practicing with race-based competency is the ability to build and sustain rapport with clients of color (Hipolito-Delgado & Reinders-Saeman, 2017). The very beginning of this process for White counselors is coming from a stance of *cultural humility*.

Cultural humility refers to the ability to take on, and understand, the stance and perspective of the other within interpersonal relationships (Hook, Davis, Owen, Worthington Jr., & Utsey, 2013). Through focusing on self-humility, on what we *don't* know about the other person(s), and likely *won't* experience due to our own social locations and privilege, we can broach race-related and other topics of cultural difference in a respectful manner that acknowledges one's own privilege and power in the therapeutic relationship. In contrast to cultural competence, cultural humility requires a lifelong learning practice (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). There is no end goal or expectation that one, particularly one coming from positions of power and racial privilege, can possibly know or experience the same things as their clients.

This chapter will focus on the case of Mac, a senior African American man who presented for mandated alcohol and drug treatment after being arrested for drug possession. I (the first author) was a newer counselor when Mac was put on my caseload at an outpatient treatment center for co-occurring issues. As a White, queer, transgender and gender nonconforming counselor living in a predominantly White city, newly graduated from my masters in counseling program at a predominantly White institution, I experienced some anxiety upon first meeting Mac. This anxiety was born out of my own internalized racism as the result of living in a country shrouded in White supremacy. Through learning a stance of cultural humility, and working on my own cultural identity development and race-based competency, Mac and I were able to develop a close therapeutic relationship over the course of nearly a year of weekly Monday afternoon meetings.

This chapter includes, (a) a brief case narrative, (b) client data including Mac's personal background and presenting problems, (c) a literature review relevant to the current case, (d) an introduction to myself, the first author, as counselor and my approach to helping, (e) a case conceptualization, (f) treatment strategy including goals and overall progress, and (g) a conclusion. It should be noted that while "Mac" is loosely based on an actual client of mine, all of his identifying information has been changed for confidentiality purposes. It is also noted and acknowledged that as I, the first author, am White, this chapter is filtered through the White experience and perspective of working cross-culturally with an African American man. The intent of this chapter and presented case is not to generalize this experience to *all* work with African Americans or clients of color. While all counselors and CIT may find this chapter useful, this chapter is written specifically for White counselors and CIT working with clients of color. This chapter also provides some experiences and insights into how counselors may go about practicing cultural humility as the foundation to using interpersonal and relational interventions to provide culturally competent services to their clients.

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