

CNS 747 Assignment 4.2

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Abstract

In this paper, I explore my interactions with people from other races and cultures. I discuss my early exposure to racism and discrimination. I discuss the way in which my parents shared their beliefs about people from other races and cultures and how my parents have influenced my Racial/Cultural Identity Development (R/CID). I conclude that there is a significant relationship between my R/CID and my ability to be an effective counselor both for majority and minority ethnic clients.

My Interactions With Different Races and Cultures

I have interacted a lot with people from different cultures than my own. I have had these interactions in both my professional life and in my personal life. In my work in home care, I have interacted extensively with several groups of people with different cultures. My interaction with Somalis has been particularly meaningful.

There is a large Somali population in Seattle as we sponsored a large community of refugees during the Somali crisis in the 1990s. I have worked with many Somali caregivers and I have also managed care for many Somali senior clients. I have also provided some direct care to Somali clients as a caregiver. The Somali community is one of the warmest communities I have ever known and I consider it a great privilege to have connected with it. I have learned a great deal about East African culture and history.

One of my dreams as a counselor is to advocate for a day health center that is optimized for Somali senior and disabled clients. In general, day health centers are a very important complementary part of a daily care plan for seniors who live at home instead of an assisted living community. Senior communities naturally offer a lot of companionship and socialization but when seniors live at home instead they often lack this socialization. Day health centers offer a place where seniors can receive assistance during the day and also have time with each other before returning to their own home. The existing day health centers are not a good option for Somalis as they just don't align with the Somali culture. I would like to help design a day health center that offers Somali speaking nurse assistants, East African cuisine, Somali activities and entertainment and other cultural and religious optimizations.

In addition to my professional interactions, I also have some personal exposure to racial and cultural diversity. I am part of a mixed race couple and my partner is Taiwanese-Canadian. A significant percentage of our friend group is made up of first generation and second generation Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants. And of course my partner's family are also first generation (her parents) and second generation (her sisters). My partner and I often say that we are more similar to each other than anyone else we have ever known. We have often marveled at this strong sentiment given we grew up in very different cultures. Interestingly, her parents' style of parenting is actually quite similar to my own and her older sister has a similar personality to my older brother. I think one very important similarity we have is our strong mutual interest in each other's backgrounds. I am fascinated by Chinese history, culture and cuisine and I am eager to learn more throughout my life.

She is also very good about sharing her traumatic experiences as a minority including several types of microaggressions. I have discussed several of the articles and stories throughout this course with her and it has been really healthy for our relationship. I think her experience as a minority is one of the main differences between us so it is really helpful for me to gain greater self awareness and knowledge of cultural identity.

One example of a microaggression is the assumption that her parenting style as a parent of Chinese descent fits into a 'Tiger Mom' stereotype. Her parenting style is very patient and gentle and does not align with such a stereotype. We both feel very grateful that we have such similar parenting styles which is important for our blended family (we each have two elementary school age children from a previous

marriage). Another example of a microaggression she has experienced are people asking her where she is from. When answers the question by explaining that she is from Toronto then a follow up question is asked about where she is from originally or where her parents are from. This is similar type of microaggression Sue identifies Latinos often experiencing (Sue, 2007).

When I First Learned About Racism

I think my elementary school probably began teaching some understanding of racism and discrimination beginning in Kindergarten or first grade. However, my first clear memory of learning about racism was a performance about Martin Luther King Jr. in the 3rd grade. We discussed how white people had established an unjust American society towards black people and Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) had helped heal our nation by showing everyone the injustice and leading the struggle for civil rights. I remember the word, "heal" because I remember understanding racism as an illness that had infected people's minds and they needed to be cured of it. I remember watching MLK's speeches and feeling like he was the most amazing person I had ever seen. I remember feeling that there was no greater accomplishment in human history than MLK's accomplishment in the civil rights movement.

A couple years later I did a solo performance of Amazing Grace on the recorder at my Fifth grade graduation. I remember thinking a lot about the horrors of slavery and that whole other level of racism. I remember feeling a powerful anger about slavery ever having existed. I remember learning about the underground railroad and Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglas and other heroes who helped. I remember feeling a

great pride in those heroes. I also remember feeling a great pain for my African-American classmates that they had to learn about such horrors being committed to African-American people.

As an adult, I remember having the most amazing feeling when Barack Obama was elected president. I had made over a thousand phone calls for him and I felt a deep sense of connection to his campaign and his message of hope for our nation and our world. I remember watching the Will.i.am video, Yes We Can, over and over again. However, I also remember feeling that no matter how powerful the experience was for me, I would never fully understand the experience for African-Americans. I remember feeling that despite all my efforts to empathize with African-Americans that there were some experiences that I would never fully understand.

Regarding my place along the continuum of the racial/cultural identity development model, I think at the time of the 2008 election I was probably in Introspection. Sometime in the last 15 years I do think I have made the transition from Introspection to Integrative Awareness (Sue, 1999). I feel I appreciate diversity racial and I am also aware of myself as a racial and cultural being and my limitations and areas of improvement I will need to attend to indefinitely.

How My Parents Have Impacted My R/CID

My parents' overarching message to me was that we should appreciate all racial and cultural diversity. They came of age in Berkeley, CA in the early 70s and formed their worldview and beliefs about how we should interact with people from different cultures in a time and place where pluralism was being championed as the path forward

for America. Previously, the prevailing perspective was that America should be a melting pot and that everyone should conform to a homogenized American culture.

My parents arrived at a different understanding about what it is to be American and that we should take great pride in the fact that America is not homogenized but instead has a rich pluralistic society strengthened by many different cultures. My parents taught me that we do have a common ground but that it isn't rooted in us being the same but rather in our common respect and admiration for each other's differences.

My parents' lessons have been very influential to my own understanding. I like to think that I understand the logic of it all independent of them but nonetheless, I agree with most everything about their perspective. Perhaps what is most influential for me now is their continued commitment to their own Racial/Cultural Development (R/CID). They recently took a civil rights trip to Selma Alabama in which they were immersed in the history of the struggle there. A professor led the trip and as part of it there was a thorough discussion of microaggressions. It is incredibly inspiring to see them continue to struggle with their own shortcomings attached to their white privilege. Their ongoing commitment to their development is very influential for me and it is something that I very much try to emulate.

How R/CID Improves me as Counselor

My ongoing racial/cultural identity development is an integral part of my ability to be an effective counselor. Therapy is all about congruence and a big part of my ability to help others achieve congruence is my work on achieving it myself. I feel I have made an enormous amount of progress along the continuum of the R/CID model through an

enormous amount of reading and work to achieve better self-awareness and to reduce my acts of microaggressions (Helms, 1984). I think one of the most important developments I continue to focus on is the understanding that we are not all the same. As I mentioned earlier, there was a competing view of race and culture that believed all our identities conform to the dominant American identity in a melting pot. I think a continual effort is needed to not slip backwards into that stage of the R/CID (Helms, 1984) and instead maintain a healthy integrative awareness of racial and cultural differences.

Continuing R/CID is very important for my ability to provide treatment for clients from different racial and cultural backgrounds as it enables me to better understand them and make them feel heard. I also think it helps makes me a more effective counselor for white male clients as it enables me to help them improve their congruence in a similar way that I have done. Actually, I feel so strongly about the benefits of R/CID that I am considering the regular practice of assigning bibliotherapy to most clients from both majority and minority ethnic clients on the subject of R/CID in order to help them achieve better congruence in this area followed by a session focused on this assignment.

References

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