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Gina C. Torino

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Examining Biases and White Privilege: Classroom Teaching Strategies That Promote Cultural Competence

GINA C. TORINO

Human Development and Educational Studies, SUNY Empire State College, New York, New York

This article will discuss in-depth how a variety of effective classroom teaching strategies have been employed to assist White counseling trainees in developing a non-racist White racial identity (i.e., by examining biases and exploring privilege) thereby increasing cultural competence. Specifically, this article will address the utility of implementing classroom teaching strategies that promote both cognitive understanding and affective processing of biases and White privilege for White trainees. It will outline the efficacy of specific didactic (e.g., lecture, videos, discussions, readings) and experiential (e.g., small group interviews, journaling, autobiographies, modeling) in creating a non-racist White racial identity, thereby promoting cultural competence.

KEYWORDS counseling, cultural competence, education, pedagogy, training, White privilege

Mental health professionals have been charged with providing competent and ethical mental health care to individuals from a variety of racial cultural groups (American Psychological Association, 2003; Brown, 2013; Kapoor, Dike, Burns, Carvalho, & Griffith, 2013). In response to this charge, training programs have steadily increased the number and improved the quality of multicultural courses taught in their curricula. While cultural competency integration has been largely met with openness, some White trainees exhibit resistance to learning about topics such as race and racism (Carter, 2005).

Address correspondence to Gina C. Torino, Assistant Professor, Human Development and Educational Studies, SUNY Empire State College, Suite 230, 500 Seaview Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10305. E-mail: gina.torino@esc.edu

Oftentimes, an examination of biases and White privilege is frequently accompanied by feelings of guilt, anxiety, shame, and anger (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo & Rivera, 2009; Sue, 2013). However, over the past 30 years, scholars and researchers have developed sophisticated didactic and experiential teaching strategies that have assisted White students in working through personal and collective racism. This article will discuss the challenges faced by White trainees in developing cultural competence as well as the effective classroom teaching strategies that have been shown to promote the examination of biases and White privilege, thereby increasing cultural competency.

OVERVIEW: CULTURAL COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT FOR WHITE STUDENTS

The development of cultural competency allows for clinicians to effectively counsel individuals from all racial-cultural groups. Briefly, cultural competency focuses on three general areas that include the clinicians' awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue et al., 1982, 1998; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Awareness encompasses psychologists' cultural and racial self-awareness, which includes the clinicians' understanding of cultural or racial beliefs and attitudes about themselves and others (Sue & Sue, 2013; Sue & Torino, 2005). Knowledge primarily focuses on the understanding of clients' beliefs, sociopolitical experiences, worldviews, cultural values, influences, and how all of these guide the clinicians' ability to conceptualize cases and plan treatments for clients. Skills refer to the clinicians' ability to effectively use interventions that are sensitive to the clients' contextual and cultural factors such as the clients' spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions.

With respect to developing cultural competency, scholars agree that the examination of what it means to be White is particularly challenging to White student trainees (Carter, 2005; Sue & Sue, 2013). Many White individuals have never thought about what it means to be White prior to encountering this question through coursework (Sue, 2010). According to Sue (2005), White trainees fear that they harbor unconscious biases and prejudices toward people of color. Research on aversive racism and implicit bias supports the contention that all White individuals have internalized racial biases and prejudices (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Jones, 1997). These implicit biases are extremely resistant to change as they operate unconsciously and manifest in subtle ways (e.g., microaggressions) (Sue, 2010). Most White people conceive of themselves as non-racist individuals and, as such, developing self-awareness of one's own biases can be threatening to one's ego (Sue, 2013).

Along with the examination of what it means to be White, confronting White privilege is essential to the development of cultural competency. White privilege has been defined as the unearned advantages of being White

in a racially stratified society and has been characterized as an expression of institutional power that is largely unacknowledged by most White individuals (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001; Qureshi & Eiroa-Orosa, 2013). In her seminal piece, Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes the ways in which she has gained unearned privileges in society just by the virtue of being White. Thinking about White privilege means confronting the myth of meritocracy by acknowledging that Whites have not attained success in life purely by their own individual efforts and that Whites have in fact benefitted from historical and contemporary forms or racism that have disadvantaged people of color (Sue, 2013).

In response to learning about White privilege, many White individuals experience fear, guilt, and anger (Sue et al., 2009; Sue, 2013). Scholars speculate that fear may be linked to downward mobility and potential loss of material benefits as well as the absence of race-based advantages, and, ultimately, fear of losing power (Neville et al., 2001). In addition, Whites may fear losing relationships and/or being rejected by people of color (Spanierman, Oh, et al., 2008).

Guilt and shame are also common reactions of White individuals to societal inequity and White privilege (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003). Scholars have found that higher levels of White privilege awareness lead to greater levels of White guilt as well as to increased support for affirmative action (Swim, Becker, Lee, & Pruitt, 2010).

In addition to affective reactions, trainees may experience cognitive defense mechanisms such as denial, rationalization and/or minimization (Sue et al., 2009; Sue & Sue, 2013). Among counseling trainees, qualitative response to Peggy McIntosh's (1988) list of White privileges ranges from a denial to an awareness of the systemic nature of privilege (Ancis & Szymanski, 2001). Behavioral reactions to White privilege range from avoidance or unwillingness to discuss its existence (Rains, 1998).

To facilitate this racial self-exploration among White trainees, educators encourage them to contemplate, write about and discuss their Whiteness as they learn about pervasive social inequities (Todd, Spanierman, & Aber, 2010). Generally, topics associated with race tend to be emotionally charged, so instructors must attend to affective responses (Hogan & Mallott, 2005).

Scholars and educators emphasize the particular importance of White trainees' emotional responses to learning about race, racism and White privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Carter, 2005). Racism is deeply embedded in the psyche and cannot be brought out into the open without experiences that challenge the invalid assumptions and beliefs of trainees (Sue, 2003). Scholars suggest a strong anti-racist component must be a part of counselor training programs. Coursework and experiential activities related to understanding oneself as a racial being are important facets of becoming culturally competent. A useful starting point is the assumption that everyone possesses biases, prejudices and racist attitudes. However, this assumption seems

especially difficult for Whites to acknowledge (Sue & Torino, 2005). In order to provide competent and ethical care, White trainees need to understand White privilege and how it functions in an unjust system of White supremacy (Sue & Sue, 2013; Tatum, 1992). However, this is no easy undertaking, as society's institutions socialize White individuals to be ignorant about structural and cultural racism (Mills, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Yeung, Spanierman, & Landrum-Brown, 2013). As educators have argued, to move White trainees from ignorance perpetuated by the White racial frame to an alternative frame that enhances their understanding of power, privilege and oppression, addressing Whiteness explicitly in coursework is crucial (Carter, 2005; Monture, 2009; Sue & Sue, 2013). Some maintain that the task of instructors is to help trainees move from a detached, cognitive understanding of course content to a more personal affective understanding (Carter, 2003). Carter (2003) states that it is essential for White trainees to examine their affective experiences in conjunction with their cognitive understanding if they are to develop cultural competency. It is recommended that instructors combine both didactic and experiential activities within one course given the affectively evocative nature of race for White trainees (Carter, 2005; Sue, Rivera, Capodilupo, Lin, & Torino, 2010).

Didactic Teaching Strategies

To increase the knowledge and awareness of what it means to be White, it is essential for any course related to cultural competency development to include didactic teaching strategies such as lectures, readings, discussions, and videos. These teaching strategies are essential because they provide trainees with knowledge (e.g., historical laws regarding the creation of Whiteness; statistics on structural inequality, etc.) that can ground racial-cultural exploration. The ultimate goal of such didactic components is to increase trainees' knowledge about race and racism as well as the sociopolitical forces that create racial disparities (Carter, 2005). In addition, these components can be useful in educating White trainees about the theories underlying White racial identity development, clinical research regarding cross-racial dyads, and White privilege. In other words, didactic teaching strategies should be focused on increasing cognitive awareness and knowledge about the *self* and *others*.

It is essential for trainees to develop a cognitive understanding of, for example, White racial identity development as well as White racial consciousness prior to undertaking an affective exploration of the meaning of Whiteness (Helms, 1995; Leach, Behrens, & LaFleur, 2002). Recommended readings include: *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (Sue & Sue, 2013); *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, & Sexual Orientation* (Sue, 2010); *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* (Nelson, 2009); *A Race is a Nice Thing to Have* (2nd ed.) (Helms,

2007); *Overcoming our Racism: A Journey to Liberation* (Sue, 2003); *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (Lopez, 1996); *Off White: Readings on Race, Power, and Society* (Fine, Weis, Powell, Mun Wong, 1997); *The Influence of Race and Racial Identity in Psychotherapy: Toward a Racially Inclusive Model* (Carter, 1995), and *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* (McIntosh, 1988) (Please see references for full citations).

Videos that document and provide illustrations of racial/cultural issues are highly recommended. The utilization of videos can supplement lectures and engage trainees by presenting thought-provoking narratives or documentaries. One video, *The Color of Fear* (Stir Fry Productions, 1994), features a racially diverse group of men who explore their life experiences as racial-cultural beings and their resulting attitudes. Another video, *A Class Divided* (Frontline, 1985) demonstrates the psychological impact of discrimination and highlights the role of socialization in the learning, or "unlearning," of bias. Other noteworthy videos include: *Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible* (World Trust Films), which highlights interviews with leading researchers on privilege; *True Colors* (MTI Film & Video), which investigates the experiences of two college men (one Black and one White) as they explore levels of prejudice solely based on race; and *Crash* (2004), a fiction film based on racial tensions in Los Angeles, California.

After any lecture and/or video presentation, it is important for the instructor to facilitate a discussion with the class. Scholars indicate that cognitive understanding of societal racism can lead to thoughts about personal racism and biases (Sue, 2010). As mentioned earlier, graduate training courses may be the first opportunities trainees have had to begin to think about what it means for them to be White (Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013). Furthermore, as trainees begin to think about White privilege and how it operates in their lives, they many begin to experience such emotions as fear, anger, guilt, shame, and frustration (Sue et al., 2010). Thus, it is important that as these discussions are facilitated, the instructor attends to emotions brought out in the classroom. It is imperative that the instructor not only validate the feelings that arise for trainees but also encourage the trainees to further process such emotions in the experiential activities associated with the course.

Experiential Teaching Strategies

Experiential learning involves trainees personally and affectively examining their own reactions, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, values, standards of normality, prejudices, stereotypes, biases, privileges, and goals (Sue & Sue, 2013). Experiential learning is particularly well-suited to raising multicultural awareness of trainees, calling assumptions into question and cultivating cultural empathy and openness (Pope-Davis, Ottavi, & Ottavi, 1994). This learning approach also involves examining how cultural factors form and direct trainees' own attitudes, behavior and beliefs (Arthur & Achenbach,

2002). Experiences that challenge a White trainee can help him or her to confront sometimes difficult and emotional aspects of his or her own racial experience. Moreover, in the classroom setting, affective learning can be experienced with lower potential negative outcomes than when trainees undergo similar experiences in the more unguided situation of actual counseling (Fowler, 1994).

In his Racial-Cultural Counseling Laboratory, Carter (2005) eloquently describes many effective experiential teaching strategies. One well-documented strategy that can assist White trainees in working through biases and White privilege is the small group interview (Carter, 2005). This interview includes prepared questions about such things as stereotypes or personal development with regard to reference groups (Carter, 2005). As one student is interviewed, other trainees are asked to take the perspective of the interviewee. Trainees in the small groups are asked to understand their various emotional and behavioral responses.

More specifically, the interview occurs in assigned small groups, which consist of approximately five to seven members that convene in a space that is separate from the large group classroom. Group selection is determined by the instructor and the teaching assistants in an effort to promote a racially diverse composition. Preferably doctoral level or advanced master's level trainees facilitate these small group interviews, which take place over the duration of the semester. The interview protocol is developed for the purposes that the trainees gain an in-depth understanding of Whiteness and of what it means to belong to that specific reference group (Carter, 2005). During the interviews, each student is provided with the opportunity to explore him or herself as a racial-cultural being. While the process of facilitating the interview may vary depending on the style and experience of the teaching assistant, each student in the group answers questions to assist in the self-reflective exploration of personal racial-cultural issues along several domains of awareness. Each student's interview lasts approximately four hours, which is usually distributed over two or three class periods. Examples of interview questions can include: "What is your earliest recollection about becoming aware of racial issues? What does being White mean to you? What do you think others might think about you as a White person? What are some of the biases, prejudices and stereotypes that you possess?"

During this interview process, difficult emotions often arise. It is important that a skilled facilitator be able to process emotions experienced by all group members. For example, White trainees, as the dominant group, may become defensive and resist fully exploring their own values, assumptions, and beliefs, if they sense that the facilitators or others are blaming them for the historical oppression of other cultures (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). In many instances, a White trainees who is asked to explore what it means to be White may resist this task by denying that race is a salient factor in his or her life for fear of being labeled a racist (Sue, 2003). Furthermore, some

have observed individual psychological resistance to training, including intellectualization, projection, and denial (Carter, 2003). In a similar way, trainees may resist when racism is not part of their self-concept and they perceive that racist attitudes or beliefs are being attributed to them. Other trainees may feel guilty upon realizing that they hold racist assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). Trainees may also be afraid of how their classroom peers will respond to their admission of socially undesirable characteristics, such as racism. They may not want to be labeled or to be judged negatively (Sue, 2010).

Trainees have found small group interviews to be highly valuable to their learning about biases and White privilege (Carter, 2005). One female trainee who underwent the Racial-Cultural Counseling Laboratory at Teachers College, Columbia University, stated that she learned "*…that I have biases very deep down… I learned through my classmates challenging me in the small group… "*(Torino, 2010).

Some educators suggest explicitly directing trainees to attend to their personal feelings, thoughts, and behavior during the experiential activities and recommend discussions that expose trainees to conflicting cultural perspectives (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Similarly valuable is explicitly asking trainees to reflect on potential counseling approaches based on the experience and to become a reflective practitioner in their counseling. The process of reflective practice is a goal of many professional training programs beyond counseling (Schön, 1987).

After each small group interview, trainees are asked to write in their weekly personal journals, which provide an opportunity to process their reactions, thoughts, feelings, and questions that arise from each class session (Carter, 2003). Carter (2003) recommends two journal sections: a cognitive factual section and an affective/reactive section. Trainees are prompted to discuss cognitive/factual information raised during the small group interaction and are then asked to process and make sense of their affective reactions. Teaching assistants, who have also taken the course, are trained to provide feedback that is helpful, challenging, and critical; the professor reviews the feedback to ensure that it is both appropriate and of high quality (Carter, 2003). The feedback provided is aimed at facilitating students' development and self-exploration with respect to further cultural issues. It is then mandatory for the trainees to respond to this feedback in the subsequent week's journal. This is seen to be an important outlet, apart from peers, for trainees to express their responses to class and small group experiences (including interactions with their peers). The journals essentially become ongoing dialogues between trainees and their respective teaching assistants.

One successful way to provide feedback is through "sober" factual information which addresses trainees' affective responses (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). For example, a White male student wrote in a journal that he was upset that a multicultural author cites himself in his own work, a text used

in the course (Sue, 2013). Perceiving this to be a form of racist resistance to personal reflection about the content of the text, the instructor pointed out in responding to the journal entry that the text's author was perhaps the most cited scholar in the field, and it would be a less thorough and helpful text if the author were to omit his own previous work (Sue, 2013). Asking trainees to reflect on such cognitive information can help them to raise awareness of their own biases, prejudices and racism.

Moreover, it seems helpful if instructors refrain from directly confronting White trainees who deny in their journals that they hold racist beliefs or have any complicity in the oppression of people of color (Garmon, 1998). Rather, an instructor can focus on having trainees explore their thoughts further, thereby placing the onus of exploration on them. Research suggests that resistance to cultural competency training is somewhat alleviated through journal writing (Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003). Additional studies have found that journal writing promotes student self-reflection, enhances self-knowledge and improves student learning overall in multicultural courses (Garmon, 1998; Mio & Barker-Hackett, 2003; Jones, Sander, & Booker, 2013).

Furthermore, experts assert that an autobiography can be especially effective for developing the competencies involving awareness of values, biases, attitudes and beliefs (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). This technique often involves trainees' writing about personal experiences that are related to their cultural group. The autobiographical sketch, a variation of this type of assignment, involves trainees discussing how an event influenced their development and knowledge in each of several reference groups: gender, race, religion, social class, and ethnicity (Carter, 2003). This assignment helps trainees understand themselves as racial-cultural human beings and to deepen this understanding. The autobiography is also an opportunity for trainees to document their development by citing recollections from their childhood, and by considering influences from their families, education, and the media with regard to their racial and cultural identities. Trainees are also encouraged to explore the messages they have received about race from various sources (e.g., family, school, media, etc.) and how these messages have shaped and continue to shape their own personal role in promoting or maintaining racism.

The autobiography assignment might also involve asking trainees to focus on a particular type of opportunity or lack of opportunity, such as education (Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). Trainees focus on how these experiences have influenced them as individuals and as a member of a cultural group. The expectations of others and of the trainees themselves can be made explicit as well as elaborated on. Advantages and disadvantages of group membership can also be explored. Making these autobiographical pieces available to others (whether facilitators or other trainees) can open up the possibility of questioning the presuppositions of the trainees. The autobiographies can also help in comparing one group's experience to another's.

Finally, a pedagogical approach that can be used in all instructional activities is that of modeling (Ponterotto, 1998). Instructors and other facilitators can provide an example in themselves of how to be open about their multicultural identities, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Instructors can talk about their own racial identity development, including negative and positive experiences and emotions. They can also talk about their concerns at the moment and their plans for continuing to develop their cultural competence. If the instructor and/or small group facilitator is White, it may be helpful to use judicious self-disclosure in admitting to holding biases against people of color as well as the ways in which he or she benefits from White privilege. It can be helpful for trainees to understand that the instructor continues to uncover the meaning of race and that he or she experiences personal challenges in the process of developing a non-racist White identity.

CONCLUSION

Examining biases and White privilege in graduate level racial-cultural counseling courses is a complex endeavor. With a combination of both didactic and experiential teaching strategies, White trainees have an opportunity to cognitively understand the construction of Whiteness as well as how racism operates in society along with underlying emotions associated with newfound knowledge and awareness. This is crucial for developing cultural competency in working with clients from all racial groups. It would be to the advantage of the fields of counseling and clinical psychology as well as social work to continue to conduct research into the efficacy of varied classroom teaching techniques in order to ensure that graduates develop the capacity to provide the highest quality mental healthcare to all individuals.

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